銃皇無尽のファフニール

スカーレット・イノセント

II

ツカサ

Illustration

梱枝りこ

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「――イリス、お前もしかして、穿いてないのか？」
びくっとイリスが肩を震わせる。
「え、あ、ち、違うよ？
いつもじゃないんだよ？
今日はたまたま穿き忘れただけなんだよ？」

「やっぱ三人は無理だって。
どっちか外へ
出てくれないか？」
「や。ティアはユウから離れないの」
細い両腕を俺の体に絡めるティア。
「……ティアさんが出ないのなら、
私も動きません。
監視役ですから。
というか
二人とも密着しすぎです」

アリエラ・ルー
Ariella Lu
「ぼ、ボクにはその……お世辞はいらないよ」
「……ありがとう」
フィリル・クレスト
Firill Crest
「……んう」
レン・ミヤザワ
Ren Miyazawa
リーザ・ハイウォーカー
Lisa Highwalker
「あなたに水着姿を見せるのは不本意ですが、来てあげましたわよ」
「い、いきなりそんなこと言われたら、あたし……」
イリス・フレイア
Iris Freyja

Prologue

—What... *am* I?
A pair of plush pink lips moved, as the young girl asked. Looking at her own reflection in the mirror, she tilted her head questioningly.
It was when she had turned seven that the girl started asking that question towards mirrors and bodies of water and such.
On the day the girl turned seven, she noticed that she was able to produce a strange kind of matter.
It was a strange sphere darker than the night, could be felt but had no weight, and was around the size of her palm.
Moreover that dark substance could be morphed into anything that the girl imagined.
When she brought it up to her parents, they were surprised—overjoyed.
They asked the girl to make gemstones. To please her parents, she made many different kinds of beautiful gemstones.
From that day on—the girl's life had completely changed.
Their house became large and majestic. Many servants were hired to take care of the housework.
The dining table was filled everyday with delicious food. Her father who had to go on business trips every year was able to stay home the whole time.
The girl continued to make gemstones as her parents asked.
But, in the midst of those joyous days, questions continued to build up in the girl's heart.
Why was I the only one with this power? The girl did not know.
—What... am I?
Unable to hold it in, she asked her parents directly, and this was how they answered.
—You're a special human.
Hearing that, the girl was relieved.
The question of how she was special remained, but it was fine as long as she was human.
However the happy and prosperous days did not last even a year.
On the night of a new moon, a group of men wielding guns suddenly burst into their house, and led the girl and her family to an unknown place.
With her parents taken as hostages, from that day on the girl started working to create gemstones for the men.

Though she was no longer allowed to go outside, as long as the girl kept making gemstones, the men were kind. They didn't do anything violent, and anything she wanted they pretty much gave her.
—What... am I?
There was a time that the girl asked the men.
—You are a "D".
But this time, a different answer than what she had heard from her parents came. At that time the girl finally found out that she was one of the few people in the world who could produce Dark Matter.
However—the girl wasn't satisfied. She did not want to believe that she was an existence different from humans.
That was why she continued asking, believing that there is another answer.
After asking all of the men, she threw the question at her own reflection, and desperately pondered.
Through the cheerless and constrained (but not poor) days, she continued to deliberate.
Then on the day of her ninth birthday—the girl met *him*.
While making gemstones like always in her luxurious room overflowing with stuffed animals, the girl noticed a commotion outside.
A short while later the men came in the house and picked up the girl.
Together with her parents who had been held captive, they were led outside the building.
Having been living in a place without windows for all this time, it was only then that the girl found out that it was nighttime. Thick clouds covered the sky, covering the moon and the stars. It's almost like the night they were captured, the girl thought.
In the distance continuous bursts of explosions could be heard. The air shook. From the other side of the building smoke drifted up, and the light from the flames hazily highlighted the outline of the town. A burnt smell wafted through the air, carried by the breeze.
It would appear that this area was on the receiving end of a large-scale attack.
To prevent the girl from escaping, a group holding her parents hostage traveled in front, while the girl followed behind, surrounded by the men.
But that first group had suddenly, with the exception of her parents, all collapsed.
The men held their breath and readied the firearms they had equipped.
Without even the sound of a footstep, from the darkness a black shadow emerged. It was a dark-haired boy around fourteen or fifteen. In his hand was a strangely shaped gun, as if it was assembled from many blocks, and with a look colder than the night he studied the men.
Asking no questions, the men started to wildly fire their guns. The boy dashed around amid the muzzle flashes, shooting his own gun.
For some reason, none of the bullets the men shot hit, but when the boy pulled the trigger, without fail one of the men would fall.

It was as if he was dancing. The girl was captivated by the boy's movements.
At last, the only ones standing were the boy and the girl. The girl's parents had collapsed and fainted a short distance away.
The boy who had defeated all the men casually approached the girl.
The boy reached out his hand. It was then that the girl finally felt a sense of danger, reactively generating a ball of Dark Matter.
The small black sphere bursted into a bolt of high voltage electricity.
Surprised by the crackle of the lightning, the boy stopped his movement.
"——"
The boy muttered something in an unknown language. It seems he was from a different country.
There was no doubt that the fact that she was a "D" had just been exposed.
The girl lamented… but immediately stopped caring.
All that was going to happen would be that her *owner* would change. This time, she would probably end up making gems for the boy.
But just in case, she asked the boy as well. He might not understand her words, but the girl was curious *what* the boy regarded her as.
"—What... am I?"
The boy's eyes opened slightly, and after some slight consideration, he reached out his hand once again.
With a light tap, his hand rested on the girl's head. It felt way larger and rougher than she had imagined.
Then, with broken words, he replied in the language the girl used.
"You are a, cute, girl."
With a comforting smile, in a kind voice, he said.
"....."
The girl was surprised. That was probably, until now, the warmest answer she had received.
It was what she always wanted, to be treated not as someone special.
"Can I also, ask, a question?"
The boy asked the dazed girl, enunciating each word slowly.
"…S-Sure."
Somehow having a hard time breathing, the girl nodded. Her heart beat like an alarm clock.
"What, will you, do, from now on?"
Suddenly asked that, she did not know how to reply. The girl who had never considered that she has the right to make her own choices looked towards her parents hesitatingly.
"Papa, mama..."
"—I see, I understand."
The boy nodded as if he understood everything, and gently stroked the girl's head.
"I hope, you live, happily."
Saying that, the boy pointed in the direction opposite to the burning town.

"If you go that way, you can meet, other refugees. Go with them, and you can probably, get out of here."
He stepped away from the girl, and turned around.
"Ah..."
Feeling a sense of desolation from losing the touch of that warm hand, the girl involuntarily let out her voice.
"If you want, to live peacefully, with your family, then don't—use your power anymore."
But without turning back, leaving only these words behind, the boy walked into the darkness. As silently as he came, slipping into the night—he disappeared.

Since then, the girl continued to live on, repeating the boy's words in her heart.
Even though those warm words were *definitely not correct*.
"...What... am I?"
The girl obtained the correct answer when she turned ten.
The witch of disaster who appeared in front of her, having scorched everything, was the one who taught her that.
"Tia, you are—a *dragon*."

Chapter 1 - Tia the Dragon Girl

Part 1

—A sharp pain.
A sharp pain ran across the back of my left hand, lifting my consciousness from the abyss of deep sleep.
Opening my eyelids, I saw dawn's rays entering through the window, shining mercilessly into my eyes, forcing me to squint.
I checked out my left hand's state, which felt like I had been bitten by a bug.
On the back of my left hand was a birthmark with a distinct shape. This dragon mark was present somewhere on the body of every person capable of generating dark matter—commonly known as Ds. Its size was directly proportional to one's dark matter generating capacity. My dragon mark was extremely small.
That tiny dragon mark was my proof as an inferior D. And next to that dragon mark, a small red swelling had appeared.
I probably bruised it accidentally while I was sleeping.
The wound was itching but I used that hand to search next to my pillow, holding back the urge to scratch it.
Touching the alarm clock with my fingertips, I brought it before my eyes to check the time.
6:10am.
Because I normally set my alarm at 6:30am, this meant that I had woken up slightly earlier than usual.
But the lingering drowsiness was not enough to make me want to lie in bed.
"...It's good to get up early once in a while."
I got off the bed and walked to the washroom, only to see my familiar face reflected in the mirror.
Perhaps due to just waking up, my eyes seemed more vicious than usual.
On the other side of the mirror, a young man was scowling and staring at me. Named Mononobe Yuu, he was sixteen years of age, ranked 2nd Lieutenant.
Arrested at the age of thirteen due to his identity as a D, he was assigned to a military organization—NIFL.
For three years, he had fought in various lands as a member of the special team Sleipnir. Finally, a month ago, he was reassigned to Midgard.
No—More accurately, he was *transferred*.

This Midgard was a *school*, converted from an uninhabited island far south of Japan, the self-governed educational institute of the Ds. Mononobe Yuu was currently living here as a student of Midgard Academy.
After washing my face with cold water, I felt my expression tense up.
I returned to my room and changed into the school's uniform.
—THUD!
Just as I was tightening my belt, I heard a massive crash coming from above.
"What...?"
I looked up at the ceiling and muttered. Directly above was the room my younger sister Mitsuki used.
Beginning to worry, I swiftly finished changing and exited my room, then went through the entrance hall to reach the second floor, arriving in front of Mitsuki's room.
"Hey Mitsuki! Did something happen?"
"Eh? N-Nii-san? I-I am fine, so—kyah!?"
While hearing a scream from the other side of the door, I heard another massive crash.
"Mitsuki!?"
I instantly opened the door.
Perhaps because the entire dorm belonged to Mitsuki, she had grown a bit careless. Mitsuki frequently did not lock her door.
I rushed into the room but was met by an unexpected sight.
Underwear of all colors were scattered inside the room while my younger sister was naked, buried in a pile of underwear. A drawer from a set of drawers was overturned completely.
Mitsuki had her hand pressed against her head and looked like she was in pain. Discovering I had entered the room, she looked up.
"W-What—"
Her snow-white skin, visible between gaps in her gorgeous long black hair and the large amount of underwear, turned scarlet from embarrassment.
Mitsuki grabbed nearby underwear to cover up her petite yet beautifully shaped breasts and glared at me. But due to the pair of s striped panties on her head, she did not look intimidating at all.
I crossed my arms and reconfirmed the situation in the room.
"Uh... It feels like you were trying to get underwear from the top drawer, but lost balance and overturned it? And it even happened twice?"
"W-What are you calmly analyzing the situation for!? The second time happened because just as I was putting the drawer back, Nii-san, you suddenly appeared! No, I should ask you leave now!!"
Mitsuki, the student council president, harshly commanded me to leave, but I did not follow her orders. Instead, I approached her while she was buried in the pile of underwear.
"Sorry, Mitsuki, before I leave, let me have a look first."
"Eh...? N-Nii-san? What are you looking at—"

Mitsuki looked up at me in her naked state. I knelt down before her and lifted up her long black hair with my hand.
"Ah... Nii-san, no... Something like that—"
With her face bright red, Mitsuki shook her head slightly in refusal, but did not resist in any other way.
I brought her head closer as though about to hug her head. Using my fingers to comb and push her long black hair away, I searched the beneath her hair.
"Nn... We still have not... The promise—Hold on, Nii-san..."
Mitsuki squirmed and exhaled hot breath.
As my fingers reached the minor bulge I was looking for, Mitsuki instantly shook.
"—Does it hurt? Although there's no bleeding... It's a bit swollen. Hold on, I'll get some ice."
Saying that, I separated from Mitsuki.
"...Eh? What is the meaning of this, Nii-san?"
Mitsuki looked up at me in surprise.
"What do you mean, what is the meaning of this? I was checking your injury. You bumped your head, right?"
"Right... Ah, ahhh, I see what was going on now, and I even thought—"
Mitsuki lowered her head in embarrassment.
"Thought what?"
Hearing me ask that, Mitsuki blushed so much that even her ears went red. She shook her head.
"N-Nothing at all!"

Sulking, Mitsuki turned her head away.
Despite her incomprehensible reaction, I still went to the kitchen to fetch an ice pack.

Twenty-five years ago, a giant creature suddenly appeared in the sky above Japan.
Simply by moving, that monster caused severe calamities. Using a supernatural power capable of conjuring matter out of thin air, the monster was able to neutralize every kind of attack the humans threw at it.
Then as though mocking the humans who resisted in desperation, the monster leisurely traveled once around the world and vanished into thin air without warning.
Thereafter, children possessing the same power as the monster became born among the humans. They were known as producers and users of dark matter, the Ds, or Type Dragon.
There was an extremely high economic value in their ability to create any type of matter arbitrarily. Reportedly, wars even broke out in the past in struggles to obtain Ds.
And during the same period while the Ds were born, new types of giant organisms appeared in the world.
These monsters with powers beyond human imagination were called dragons by the world. An international organization, Asgard, was established specifically to deal with dragons.
Asgard reorganized the United Nations troops into NIFL, a military force that could operate outside of conventional laws, trying to use military intervention to resolve various problems caused by dragons.
Due to the fact that the Ds were designated as one of the problems caused by dragons, an isolation facility was constructed on an uninhabited island near the equator, namely, Midgard in its infancy.
When it was first established, Midgard's purpose leaned closer to detainment, but as the Ds grew up and increased in number, their voices grew in strength and they finally won human rights and autonomy.
Hence, Midgard became the current state... But for some unknown reason, all humans born as Ds were female, hence, Midgard inevitably became an all-girls school.
However, I was enrolled in that kind of secret garden.
That was because I, too, possessed the power to generate dark matter.
Currently the only male D in the world, that was me—Mononobe Yuu.
Or perhaps because I was an exception, back when I was arrested three years ago, they did not send me to Midgard. Instead, I was cultivated as a soldier in NIFL.
But one month ago, I was suddenly reassigned to Midgard.
That was arranged by my younger sister Mitsuki who had amassed substantial authority in Midgard.

Ever since, I lived a school life under Mitsuki's *supervision*.
As I was the only male in the school, to prevent problems arising because of me, Mitsuki made me live in her dorm, separate from ordinary dorms.
—Hence, walking to school like this with Mitsuki together had gradually become my daily life each morning.
"You have been acting a bit weird lately, Nii-san."
After breakfast, the two of us left the dorm together. On the way to school, Mitsuki remarked unhappily.
Because there was a long way to go before the path converged with that of ordinary dorms, no other students could be seen in our surroundings.
The road followed the breakwater on the shore, tracing out a gentle curve.
The other side of the breakwater was a vast stretch of blue sea and white sands.
The only sounds were that of the waves, the coconut trees swaying in the wind, and the footsteps from Mitsuki and me.
"How am I weird?"
Since I had no clue, I asked her honestly.
Mitsuki kept switching hands to carry her schoolbag as though she could not settle down, then she looked up at me.
"How should I put this...? Recently, Nii-san, you have been acting without delicacy, such as entering my room without knocking, approaching me nonchalantly while I was naked... I believe you are acting a bit too unreserved."
"...? Siblings aren't supposed to act reserved to each other, right? Are you asking me to act more distant towards you, Mitsuki?"
Unable to understand Mitsuki's allegations, I frowned and asked.
"That is not what I mean..."
Mitsuki frantically lowered her head. She seemed unable to explain clearly.
—Was there something wrong with my behavior?
But even after thinking back to scrutinize my behavior, I still did not think I did anything wrong.
But... There was only one reason that could explain why Mitsuki had this feeling.
Two weeks ago, during the battle against the white dragon—"White" Leviathan—that was invading Midgard, I took a slight risk.
In order to break out of the crisis, I accepted *knowledge of power* that eroded my personality and memories.
But the most important information to me right now—everything that had happened after arriving at Midgard—I should not have forgotten any of it. I also knew clearly about my little sister Mitsuki. My memories at NIFL also remained vivid.
However, it was also possible that I was simply unaware of it. I might have *changed in nature* in fact.
Three years ago, apart from memories related to Mitsuki, all my other memories were eroded to oblivion. My emotion of fear had also become

extremely diluted. Perhaps just like that time, the personality named Mononobe Yuu had become even more distant from me.
"...Nii-san, what is the matter with you?"
Seeing me silent, Mitsuki made a worried expression and peered at my face from below.
—No good. I can't let Mitsuki worry. Mitsuki was the one person I absolutely must not allow to find out.
Because if she knew what I had lost as the price, Mitsuki would surely blame herself.
Hence, I switched my consciousness and changed the subject cheerfully.
"Hmm? Oh, I was recalling what happened this morning. I wanted to say that you've grown quite a bit over the past three years, Mitsuki."
Immediately, Mitsuki went red in the face.
"P-Please do not reminisce about that! I-If you were to repeat the same words in school, Nii-san, I shall have to punish you for sexual harassment! You will be punished to write ten repentance essays!"
"Man... I don't ever want to write another repentance essay again. Give me a break."
Due to insubordination in the previous battle, I was punished to write almost a hundred repentance essays. To be honest, it made me suffer even more than NIFL's training.
"Then please think very carefully before you speak."
"...Affirmative, student council president. But what happened this morning really doesn't seem like a blunder you'd make, Mitsuki. Shouldn't daily necessities like underwear be kept somewhere easier to reach?"
The drawer Mitsuki had dropped on the ground was the top drawer—It was at a height that she could barely reach on tiptoe. Hence it came as no surprise that she overturned it.
"That is... a drawer I normally have no need to use. It is for keeping slightly special underwear."
"Special? So it's what people call victory underwear?"
Hearing me ask that, Mitsuki frowned.
"Another statement filled with the flavor of sexual harassment... Sigh, as much as I hate to admit it, perhaps that does come close in meaning. Because in a certain sense, it is underwear used for battle."
"Battle, you say? Against what?"
Hearing me ask with curiosity, Mitsuki answered with a slightly solemn expression.
"Although ordinary students have not been informed yet, an impromptu health examination will actually be held today. In order to maintain the integrity of the student council president's dignity after undressing, I must exercise extra caution on the matter of underwear."
Finding out about Mitsuki's secret efforts, I sighed.
"...Life must be tough being the student council president. But these random sampling health examinations... Are they frequent in Midgard?"

I still had yet to get a grasp on Midgard's common knowledge, so I asked Mitsuki this question.
"No, this is the first time."
"Is there a reason for doing this?"
I asked immediately, only to see Mitsuki nod in admission.
"—Indeed there is a reason, but I cannot reveal it yet."
Seeing her put on her student council president's face, refusing firmly to reveal the truth, it was very hard for me to pry further.
Hence, I gave up asking the reason and turned my gaze forward.
On the other side of the flourishing jungle, I could catch a glimpse of the tip of the clock tower, the school's symbol.
Feeling like something was about to happen, walking with Mitsuki side by side, I made my way along the path to the school for Ds—

Part 2

As soon as we reached the campus, Mitsuki told me she had something to do at the faculty office and went in the clock tower's direction alone. The clock tower was Midgard's core location. In addition to the faculty office, the command center and other important facilities were also concentrated there.
She probably had to discuss matters with the teachers regarding the impromptu health examination.
Hence, I walked over to the school building where my classroom was.
Ds in Midgard were assigned to one of nine homerooms according to age and level of knowledge. Since I was assigned to Mitsuki's Brynhildr Class, even during classes, I was constantly under Mitsuki's watchful supervision.
Brynhildr Class was located on the same floor as storerooms and unused classrooms, so there were very few people. Still, this school had pitifully few students to begin with, relative to the school's size. Despite having fewer than seventy students, the school contained as many as four classroom buildings, each three stories tall.
Although it was probably an intentional decision during construction to accommodate a continued increase in Ds... Given the current situation, even if only one classroom was occupied per floor, it still left one entire building unused.
Hence, although there were school girls all over the place on the way to school, a lively sight, as soon as one entered the school building, the surroundings became very silent.
Walking in a silent atmosphere almost like a hospital's, I discovered a girl pacing back and forth in front of Brynhildr Class. For some reason, she was holding her skirt hem tightly, fidgeting awkwardly, hesitating and not daring to enter the classroom.
Bathed in the rays of dawn streaming in from the window, the girl had dazzling silver hair and clear, flawless snow-white skin. When standing still, she was as beautiful as a work of art. She was someone I knew quite well.
—Iris Freyja.
She was the classmate who sat on my left inside the classroom.
She was originally treated as a poorly performing student due to her inability to make good use of her powers. I, on the other hand, was like a novice in Midgard in terms of using my powers. Previously, we had trained

together in preparation for a test and also joined forces to fight the invading Leviathan.
Apart from my sister Mitsuki, she was the one closest to me in school, but—
I nervously gulped.
—No good, don't be nervous, I have to stay calm.
I first took a deep breath then say greeted Iris who looked like she had not noticed me yet.
"Good morning, Iris."
"Hawah!?"
"Woah!?"
Because Iris jumped in fright, it also made me jump in fright.
Her dazzling thighs were exposed under the lightly fluttering skirt.
Realizing this in alarm, Iris immediately held down her skirt hem with her face bright red.
"M-Mononobe... Did you see it?"
Iris asked in a trembling voice.
"I-I didn't see it, no, I should say that I saw nothing in the first place."
Under the pressure of Iris' gaze, I answered truthfully.
"Really? Did you really really see nothing at all?"
But Iris persisted in her questioning relentlessly. There were tears welling up in the corners of her eyes. Her snow-white complexion was also getting flush red.
Urgh...
Iris, with her full range of emotions on display like this, was extremely attractive. It made me unable to look her in the eye directly, so I could not help but shift my gaze away. This made Iris move closer to me.
"Ah, that reaction looks like you're lying! You really did see it!"
"N-No, that's not what I mean! I really didn't see it!"
I explained myself while backing away and soon hit the corridor's wall behind me. With tears in her eyes, Iris glared at me from extremely up close, cornering me completely.
I could feel Iris's breathing and her soft bosom touching me slightly.
At this moment, something recent flashed through my mind.
—Thank you, Mononobe.
Accompanied by words of thanks, what touched me were Iris' cherry lips.
Under the starry sky, a first kiss on the beach.
Probably literally what she meant, Iris only meant to thank me. Because the moment before the kiss, she also said she wanted to be friends with me, so I suppose that was an act of affection. It must be due to the kind of culture she grew up in.
However, no matter how much I used this kind of reason to persuade myself, I found myself being conscious of her at all times.
Because Iris herself treated me the same way as before, I mobilized all the self-control I had developed back in NIFL, trying to behave in a natural manner.

But with her so close right now, it was hard not to slip up.
"Mononobe, you should speak honestly, otherwise I'll feel very troubled..."
With her whispering almost clinging onto me, I felt my face starting to get hot.
"Like I said, I'm not lying! I didn't see anything! I didn't see any panties!"
I answered frantically like this but for some reason, Iris panicked even more.
"What... You did see it after all!"
"Huh? What are you talking about?"
I inquired of Iris because I could not understand her reaction, but tearfully, she shook her head.
"Boo-hoo... O-Of all people, I can't believe Mononobe saw it... I-I am not a pervert, okay? I am absolutely not a pervert, okay?"
"Pervert?"
Completely lost by this non sequitur, I felt baffled.
But after seeing how Iris clamped the hem of her shirt between her thighs, the way she absolutely refused to let her skirt lift up, a shocking possibility surfaced in my mind.
"—Iris, by any chance, are you *not wearing any*?"
Iris' shoulders trembled.
"Eh, ah, n-no! I'm normally not like this, okay? It's just today that I happened to forget to wear them, okay?"
"...So you really aren't wearing any."
Seeing her still so careless, I could not help but sigh.
"Eh...? Based on how you worded that, you really didn't see just now?"
"Yeah, like I repeated so many times, I didn't see anything at all."
If I had seen it, I probably would have failed to remain calm.
"Thank goodness... No wait, this is still no good! Now you know I'm not wearing them, Mononobe!?"
Covering her face, Iris crouched down. Showing joy one moment and depression the next, she seemed quite busy.
"No, umm, this happens to everyone at least once."
With an embarrassment in my heart, I comforted Iris.
"This is already who knows how many times..."
So it was hopeless.
"......How did you get through this previously?"
"Wearing gym clothes... I can sort of get through the day. But there's neither a practical lesson on powers nor PE class today... I didn't bring my bloomers... So that's why I was hesitating whether I should make a trip back to the dorm or not."
Now I finally understood why Iris was loitering in front of the classroom.
If she went back now, she might end up late, that was why she hesitated: should she risk tardiness? Or should she spend a whole day without wearing panties, worried the whole time that she would be exposed?
But I remember that today—

"Iris, even if you will end up being late, I think it's best that you make a trip back."
I placed my hand on Iris' shoulder and said solemnly.
"W-Why?"
"I heard from Mitsuki that there's an impromptu health examination today, apparently."
Iris' face instantly turned pale.
"Mononobe! I'm going back to put on my panties!"
Iris yelled loudly, so loud that her voice echoed in the corridor. Then she suddenly stood up.
Next, holding her skirt hem down with her hands, she raced along the corridor and left.
"..."
Speechlessly, I watched her depart.
Iris had forgotten one important detail. This place was right in front of the classroom's door.
I opened the door and entered the classroom, only to see the blonde girl in the front row staring coldly at me.
My classmate, Lisa Highwalker.
She was a girl with a fierce personality. Clashing with me multiple times when I first transferred here, in the beginning, she refused to respond even when I greeted her. But right now, she finally agreed to treat me as a "probationary classmate."
"Lisa, that yell just now... Did you hear everything?"
I asked her with a wry smile surfacing on my face. Lisa pointed at me while glaring sharply.
"I can't believe you made Iris-san yell something so disgraceful... This is a failure in supervision, Mononobe Yuu!"
"Eh? That was my fault just now?"
Not expecting the finger to be pointed at me, I grew frantic.
"Naturally, keeping the clumsy Iris-san under control is your responsibility. In order to prevent her from getting ridiculed, you have to put in more thought!"
"...When did I become Iris' nanny?"
I sighed and protested in a small voice, but she ignored my complaint and called out to the other classmates. Apart from Mitsuki and Iris, all others were present.
"That is precisely why. Everyone, please pretend you never heard those disgraceful words just now. In a show of gratitude for our willingness to keep the secret, he has offered to treat us for lunch today."
Hearing her call out, the classmates reacted in their respective ways.
"...Got it."
Someone answered quietly. She was the bibliophile who spent every free moment reading books. Firill Crest.
"Mm."

Only nodding and replying with a single syllable, it was the petite and red-haired girl, Ren Miyazawa.
"Mononobe-kun's treat? I'm looking forward to it."
Smiling innocently, this tomboyish girl was Ariella Lu.
"H-Hey, how could decide on your own—"
I was frantically about to interrupt when Lisa cut me off.
"Oh my? Is there any problem?"
"Eh? Oh..."
Thinking over it calmly, it was actually not a problem, because including me, all Ds in Midgard received an ample sum of money every month, deposited into their account for living expenses. Treating them for lunch once was not going to make my life hard.
As long as I accepted this condition, Iris would not get embarrassed and I could also have lunch with everyone. For someone like me who still had not shared a meal with Lisa and the others, this was a perfect chance to get acquainted with my classmates.
—So actually, she went through a convoluted process to invite me to join them for lunch?
On further thought, Lisa and the others did not lack cash either, so getting treated by others would offer virtually no benefit to them.
"...Got it, today's lunch will be on me. So please don't bring up Iris' disgraceful yell in front of her."
Deciding to accept Lisa's kind intentions, I nodded and agreed to her condition.
"Understood. You are fast on the uptake."
Lisa smiled with satisfaction. I leaned my face close to her ear and whispered thanks to her.
"—Thank you, Lisa."
"I-I have no idea what you mean by that. Besides, your face is too close!"
Blushing, Lisa pushed me away.
Inside this classroom, the most active in helping others, treasuring her classmates as though they were family, was this girl, Lisa Highwalker.
Despite a personality that was slightly too fierce, she was probably more kindhearted than anyone. She turned her face away unhappily.
I could only walk to my seat with a wry smile.
—How I look forward to the lunch break. I wonder if Iris will get back before class starts?
The second advanced on the clock installed over the blackboard. Mitsuki and Shinomiya-sensei, the homeroom teacher, entered the classroom three minutes before the lesson.
Then the bell rang for the start of class. I sighed. Iris did not make it after all. But just before the ringing ended, the classroom's door was opened violently.
"I-I made it..."
Panting heavily, Iris sat down unsteadily on the seat neighboring me.

As soon as she spotted my gaze, Iris made a thumbs-up and said:
"I did it! Mononobe!"
"...Yeah, good work."
Intentionally pretending not to notice the pitying gazes from Lisa and the others, I praised Iris for her hard work.

Part 3

"—Today, first and second period will be altered to conduct an impromptu health examination. The examination will be carried out by homeroom. While waiting for this homeroom's turn, please remain in the classroom and do self-studying."
There was a health examination just as Mitsuki foretold. After announcing this during homeroom, Shinomiya-sensei quickly left the classroom. She seemed quite rushed.
Lisa and the other classmates looked at one another, not knowing what had happened. On the other hand, I turned my gaze to the younger sister who seemed to know the inside story, but Mitsuki feigned ignorance and started to study on her own. She looked like she did not intend to explain.
Soon after, Shinomiya-sensei returned to the classroom to announce "your turn, please head over to the infirmary."
Hence, we stood up from our seats and exited the classroom. I was just about to follow Mitsuki and the others when Shinomiya-sensei grabbed me by the collar.
"Ack... Cough, cough!"
Shinomiya-sensei looked at me in exasperation while I kept coughing.
"Mononobe Yuu, do you intend to be examined together with the girls? Boys should go this way."
Dragged by Shinomiya-sensei, I alone was taken to another place.
Passing through a connecting corridor then taking the elevator at the clock tower, Shinomiya pressed the button for the top floor. Watching the numbers fly up rapidly on the display panel, I felt my ears ring lightly.
Ding—
The elevator stopped and the doors opened. Then I saw a grand and luxurious wooden door towering before me.
"Uh... This place is...?"
"Just read the door plate and you'll know, right?"
Shinomiya-sensei pointed at the door plate beside the door. It read "Principal's Office."
"Principal? Does Midgard have that kind of position...? I thought you were the highest authority in Midgard, Shinomiya-sensei."
Even during the full-school assembly held when I transferred in, I had not seen anyone resembling a principal being present. So before this, I did not even know that such a person existed.

"I am purely the battle commander during emergencies. Midgard's chief administrator is the lady inside this room."
Saying that, Shinomiya-sensei glanced at the very thick-looking door. The so-called principal was apparently a woman.
"So... Why was I taken here? Aren't we doing a health examination...?"
"Yes, of course the purpose is for a health examination. The principal will personally conduct your examination."
Shinomiya-sensei answered with a nonchalant expression.
"The principal will personally conduct my examination? Why exactly?"
"Who knows. Probably on a whim of hers. She does not work seriously most of the time, always hiding in her room without coming out. Sometimes she might make unreasonable demands like this one, but she says she is licensed as a doctor, so you probably won't die."
Hearing Shinomiya-sensei mention ominous words nonchalantly, I began to panic.
"Is... this principal that dangerous a person?"
"This is something you can confirm with your own eyes. Because talking to her is very tiring, I shall excuse myself here. After the examination, please return directly to the classroom."
After saying that, Shinomiya-sensei gave my back a push then she walked towards the elevator to leave.
"...Eh? You want me to go inside alone?"
"Yes, good luck."
Shinomiya-sensei saluted me with a serious face then she took the elevator down for real.
Left behind, I had no choice but to knock.
"—Please come in."
Hearing a female voice respond, I cautiously opened the door.
The room's interior was even dimmer than the corridor and there was a unique smell. Perhaps incense was burning.
The top floor of the clock tower should be the best spot for natural lighting but the windows were covered by thick curtains.
There were two people in the room.
One was a young blue-eyed blonde reclining in a luxurious chair. The other was a woman dressed as a maid, standing on the side.
The girl was petite and looked even younger than me on first glance... But my battle-hardened instincts rejected such a notion.
That expression of confidence, that gaze that seemed to be scrutinizing others, that body totally relaxed—She was undoubtedly a *seasoned veteran* even more experienced than me. From her, I could feel calm composure akin to an old soldier waiting for retirement.
"You must be the principal, right?"
I gazed into the girl's eyes and asked.
"Wow, you have good eyes. It's been so long since I met someone for the first time without getting underestimated."

The girl smiled with delight as she spoke. She sounded different from the voice answering the door when I knocked, which meant that it was probably the maid beside her who had answered.
The girl's gaze checked me out from head to foot without reservation. Then she said:
"Just as you say, I am Midgard's chief, Charlotte B. Lord. And over here is Mica Stuart, my personal secretary."
Introduced by the girl—Principal Charlotte—the maid lowered her head and bowed to me.
"I am Mica Stuart, pleased to make your acquaintance."
"I am Mononobe Yuu, nice to meet you too..."
After introducing myself to the principal and Mica-san, I then asked:
"...So why are you taking the trouble to examine me, Principal?"
"Including staff, everyone in Midgard is female. If they accidentally go into heat after seeing a man's body, it would be a problem. Because the pure maidens gathered here are my harem!"
Spreading her arms, the principal declared loudly.
"S-Sure..."
I simply scratched my face, not knowing how to react. The principal was evidently a bit eccentric. I could sort of understand why Shinomiya-sensei wanted to avoid seeing her.
"Hence, because there's no choice, I decided to diagnose you personally."
Standing up from her chair, the principal walked towards me.
"Uh, but Principal, you and Mica-san are ladies too..."
"Hmph, don't compare Mica and I with those innocent maidens. Besides, I have no interest in men at all."
Revealing the shocking truth nonchalantly, the principal looked up at me from up close. Although she only reached my chest in height and had tender and delicate snow-white skin, judging from what she said just now, she should be older than the students.
"...May I ask your age, Principal?"
"Curious? I don't mind telling you, but you won't be able to walk out of this room, okay?"
The principal narrowed her eyes and smiled maliciously.
"Then forget it..."
"Yes, that's the smart choice."
With the corners of her lips rising, the principal grabbed my left hand.
"What are you doing—"
"So this is your dragon mark?"
The principal ignored my surprise and asked, staring at the small birthmark on the back of my left hand.
"Y-Yeah..."
My dragon mark was far smaller than other Ds. I was quite impressed that she found it, unbelievably.
"There is a wound near it. When did it appear?"

The principal pointed at the swelling next to the dragon mark.
"Oh, when I woke up this morning, somehow the wound was there... I probably scratched it somewhere."
"I see..."
Staring at my wound, the principal slowly brought her face near and planted her soft lips on the back of my hand.
"Wha..."
A warm and moist sensation caressed the wound. Seeing the blonde girl extend her red little tongue, licking the wound, I felt my spine tremble involuntarily. There was a sting on the wound accompanied by pleasurable pain, it almost made me cry out.
—Smooch.
Then the principal moved her lips away. Calmly, she observed the wound that was wetted by saliva.
"P-Principal?"

Unable to understand the situation, I called to the principal.
"Shut up and don't move."
But the principal commanded with a forceful tone. I had no choice but to hold my tongue.
Then after several minutes, the principal finally released my left hand.
"—I understand for the most part. This is fine. This ends the examination."
"Huh...?"
I opened my mouth wide in surprise.
"What are you so shocked for? You want a super beauty like me to examine every inch of your body? But I am not obliged to service men, because this health examination is a ruse for checking the students' dragon marks."
Smiling sardonically, the principal shrugged.
"The goal is to check dragon marks...? Then you don't mean that..."
I could only think of one reason for doing that. I could not help but gasp.
"Don't panic, once the examination ends, the situation will become clear. Putting that aside—"
The principal pulled my hand and brought her face up close. Then with a mischievous smile, she said quietly to me:
"Since the examination ended so quickly... You should be quite free, right? Do you want to go on an adventure with me?"
"Adventure?"
I frowned and asked.
"Yes, since the school is currently conducting a health examination for girls, the pure and innocent girls are dressed in nothing but underwear, aren't they? How could we not go for a peek?"
"A-Are you really the principal?"
Hearing such an outrageous proposal, I blurted out a retort and forgot to use polite language.
"What, you refuse? I thought you'd understand this irrepressible urge, seeing as you are a man. Or perhaps you have no interest in women?"
"You're wrong, I am a normal male..."
"Then there's no problem, right!? Although I've never had any interest in doting on men, I've always wanted friends with similar interests! Today, let me show you an excellent peeping spot I discovered—"
Just as the principal showed excitement in her eyes, she suddenly vanished from view.
I looked up to see the secretary, Mica-san, lifting the principal up by her head, suspending her in midair.
"Charlotte-Same, do you understand your position? Please do not lead students astray."
Now that I am looking from a closer position, I discovered that Mica-san was very intimidating in various ways. Her bust was so huge that it was almost bursting out of her clothing. Her height was similar to mine, quite tall for a woman.
"L-Let me go, Mica! I-I must go on an adventure with my friend!"

Mika-san ignored the struggling principal. Smiling at me, she said:
"You may return. As for Charlotte-sama, I will watch her carefully and prevent her from doing anything improper to the students."
"O-Okay, got it."
Despite her gentle expression, I felt overwhelming pressure. Also, she had approached me just now without my sensing her presence. Through observing her centre of gravity, I concluded she was most likely trained in martial arts. Mica-san was clearly no ordinary secretary.
Hence, I swiftly spun right and walked to the door.
"Mononobe Yuu."
But just as I was about to exit, the principal called to me.
I looked back to see her speaking while still suspended in the air by Mica-san.
"Your wound—It is a medal that will never disappear. Be proud of it."
Staring at my left hand, that was what the principal said to me.
—A medal… that will never disappear?
What did she mean? I gazed questioningly at the principal but she simply showed a hint of a smile on the corners of her lips with no intention of explaining more.
Thus suspended in midair, the principal was taken to the inner part of the principal's office.
—What did that mean?
With doubt in my mind, I closed the door and returned to the classroom.

Part 4

Apart from being a self-governed educational institute for Ds, Midgard had another undisclosed function.
Spreading out with the island as its center, Midgardsormr was one of the lines of defense for resisting dragons, thereby protecting Midgard.
This modified island was an interception stronghold designed for fighting dragons.
Lessons taught about how to use powers for fighting dragons. Outstanding students were selected to join the Counter-Dragon Squad.
The reason why they were combat ready to such an extent was because it was already certain that dragons would attack Midgard eventually.
Dragons would select a suitable D as their mate. The chosen D’s dragon mark would change in color. Once the D comes into contact with the dragon, the D would turn into the same type of dragon.
Although this felt unbelievable, two years ago, it was said that this phenomenon was confirmed during the battle against "Purple" Kraken.
Then two weeks earlier, after Iris' dragon mark changed color, "White" Leviathan had attacked Midgard.
"—There is a reason for this impromptu health examination."
During third period after the health examination ended, a nervous atmosphere was hanging in the classroom similar to two weeks ago.
Standing at the lectern, Shinomiya-sensei swept her gaze across us then continued.
"The dragon that we have planned continuously to vanquish—'Red' Basilisk —has already started moving from its territory in the Sahara Desert."
The classroom clamored. Apart from Mitsuki, all classmates showed surprise on their faces.
Having heard about the health examination's aim from the principal beforehand, I thought to myself, just as I suspected, now this made sense.
Apart from dragon-related matters, there was nothing much that needed to examine dragon marks.
After people's shock subsided, Shinomiya-sensei spoke:
"Ever since Basilisk appeared twenty years ago, it has never left the desert. We suspect that its unusual behavior is for the purpose of finding a mate. In order to avoid panic, we checked your dragon marks under the pretext of a health examination. And the result is—"

The air grew tense. It seemed like even Mitsuki did not know the examination result yet because she stared seriously at Shinomiya-sensei.
"—Out of all the students in Midgard, no one's dragon mark has changed color."
Phew... Sitting adjacent to me, Iris exhaled in relief.
However, Shinomiya-sensei shook her head while her expression remained solemn.
I had a bad feeling. Memories sleeping deep in my heart sounded an alarm.
"You cannot relax because this is an extremely bad result. If Basilisk's destination matches our predictions, then it is an undiscovered D who has been targeted."
Hearing Shinomiya-sensei's words and understanding the situation, Iris said frantically:
"T-Then we must protect her!"
"Yes, you are right. We will not give up on our kin. Right now, NIFL is searching towns along Basilisk's route of advance. As soon as they are found, arrangements will be made to transport discovered Ds to Midgard."
Shinomiya-sensei replied forcefully, Immediately, Lisa raised her hand to speak.
"Is there anything we can do to assist? Similar to during the Leviathan battle, if we could stall it somehow—"
"No. Basilisk is the complete opposite of Leviathan which focused the most on bolstering defenses. Of all dragons, Basilisk possesses the greatest attack power. Once you engage it in battle, there are only two options. Kill it or be killed."
"Then why not take this opportunity to kill it?"
Lisa answered defiantly. These were words stemming from competence and confidence, but Shinomiya-sensei made a troubled look.
"As much as I'd like to do that too... Our preparations are incomplete. We cannot afford to suffer painful losses due to insufficient preparation. Please understand."
"Hmm..."
Despite feeling dissatisfied, Lisa still dropped the issue.
After confirming that no one else had questions, Shinomiya-sensei spoke in a gentle tone:
"...Oh, although I've said many things to unsettle you, Midgard is in no direct danger for the time being. Before the situation changes, please carry on with your usual lives and save up your energy. That's all."
With that, we returned to daily life after finding out about the distant crisis.
However, I still felt agitated and unsettled inside my heart.
—Undiscovered Ds.
This term echoed in my mind.
During my time in NIFL, there was one time when I let a discovered D go, because she was a very young girl. I thought separating her from her parents would be too cruel.

And back then, I did not know that Ds were targeted by dragons.
But it was that decision that led to the current situation.
—Should I have sent that child to Midgard back then...?
Looking out the window into the distant sky, I prayed that she was still living a happy life with her family.

"...I feel so nervous."
During the lunch break that day, I kept my promise and sat down at the same dining table as Lisa and the others. Unaware of how things came to be, Mitsuki and Iris were also present.
The venue was the cafeteria on the first floor of the catering building. With Brynhildr Class' entire roster gathered on this table, we were clearly the center of people's attention.
With Mitsuki being the student council president while I was a boy, it could not be helped that we attracted attention. However, many people were gazing fervently at Lisa and the others too.
Perhaps used to such an atmosphere, Mitsuki and Lisa were not bothered, looking relaxed and composed.
The table was already covered with food. Compelled by the situation, I had to treat Mitsuki and Iris as well, but seeing as I owed them many favors, I had no complaints at all.
"Mononobe, thank you for paying for lunch. But why are you treating us today?"
Despite thanking me, Iris felt perplexed and asked.
I could not possibly reveal the reason was because of Iris' disgraceful yell, so I shifted my gaze away and answered:
"Nothing much, because I've caused lots of trouble to everyone, this is a show of my gratitude."
This was not the real reason but not a lie either. I was very grateful to Lisa and the others for treating me as classmates despite my male gender. As for Mitsuki, she was looking after me on a daily basis.
"Eh? It's you who saved me many times, Mononobe. I should be the one to say thanks..."
"Hmm... How should I say this? I think I've already received too much thanks from you, Iris..."
I suppressed my embarrassment and replied.
"Received too much? What do you mean?"
But Iris widened her eyes and tilted her head in puzzlement. She had not realized the meaning behind my words completely, dealing a huge blow to me. Sure enough, from Iris' point of view, that kiss was purely just to express gratitude.
"Uh, that's, two weeks ago..."

No helping it. I had no choice but to explain to her quietly and ambiguously in a way other people would not understand. About what had happened that day, this was actually my first time bringing it up.
"Two weeks ago? Isn't that—"
Iris' face immediately heated up, becoming so red that it was almost about to smoke. She bowed her head.
"Eh? H-Hey, Iris?"
I was surprised by her unexpected reaction. With her mental circuits overheated, Iris did not respond to me at all.
"Excuse me, Nii-san, what did you just mention? If it was verbal sexual harassment, it is not permitted, you know?"
Listening intently on the side, Mitsuki glared at me.
"Mononobe Yuu, if you are shaming Iris-san again, I would have to teach you a lesson, yes?"
Lisa also stared sharply at me, questioning me.
Iris came back to her senses at this time and waved her hands frantically to deny.
"Oh, n-no! It's nothing! Mononobe didn't do anything!"
"...Then why is your face so red?"
Hearing Firill's calm observation, Iris instantly became awkward.
"Ehhhh!? Is my face that red?"
"Mm."
Ren nodded. Iris pressed her hands on her cheeks and looked at me helplessly.
"Wah, oh no, my face is so hot... W-What do I do, Mononobe?"
"E-Even if you ask me, I don't know how to answer you."
Seeing Iris' reaction, even I began to feel embarrassed.
"Eh? Even Mononobe-kun's face is going red? How suspicious."
Ariella leaned forward to observe my face.
"Y-You're overthinking things. Forget it, the food is all here, let's begin, shall we? Because time is limited for the lunch break."
I desperately tried to change the subject and Iris followed my lead.
"That's right, the food won't taste good if it goes cold, right? I-I'm so famished, I can't bear it anymore!"
She sounded like she was reciting dialogue but seeing how Iris resolutely refused to broach the subject, everyone stopped pressing the issue.
"...Since Iris-san says so, we should halt our questioning of Nii-san on this occasion. Also, we seem to have attracted many people's concern."
Mitsuki swept her gaze across the students in the surroundings who were observing us then picked up her fork. Mitsuki's lunch was Japanese-style pasta.
I felt that she implied she would demand an explanation later, but at least the crisis seemed to be over for now.
"Then I'll start!"

Iris picked up her spoon, perhaps to hide her embarrassment, and started to eat her vegetable curry and rice with astounding vigor.
—So Iris was conscious of that too.
Glancing sideways at Iris whose face was still bright red, I delivered my sandwich to my mouth.
In other words, I was not the only person trying hard to pretend everything was normal.
Now that the thought crossed my mind, I found it difficult to calm my feelings.
"Shall we all begin as well?"
Lisa asked me.
"Yeah, sure. Please go ahead."
I nodded and everyone else started to eat.
For a while, only the sounds of utensils striking dishes could be heard. But before long, everyone began to chat naturally.
Of course, the topic was Basilisk.
"—About Basilisk starting to move. Does everyone think that its real objective is a D?"
Mitsuki asked everyone in a serious tone of voice. Lisa frowned and said:
"Judging on basis of the time scale, I believe that it is too soon. 'Purple' Kraken and 'White' Leviathan's attacks were separated by as long as two years... But this time, only two weeks has elapsed, you know?"
Immediately, Ariella, who had been tearing her bread into pieces to eat, stopped and refuted her.
"Hmm... I think it's possibly that someone somewhere had a dragon mark that changed in color. After all, this is the first time in twenty years that Basilisk left the desert, right?"
Despite showing a troubled expression in response to Ariella's opinion, Lisa still nodded in agreement.
"Indeed... There is the viewpoint that Basilisk should be judged on its own without discussing relations with other dragons. However, if its target was a D outside, then many problems could arise..."
Hearing her say that, Firill lowered her head and murmured quietly:
"...Right, those outside Midgard have not yet become our family. Besides, we have no idea whether she is someone who ought to be protected."
I could guess roughly what she meant.
In a case like this, the situation could end up very different depending on what kind of person the targeted D was.
"What do you mean? Aren't all Ds on our side?"
But Iris widened her eyes and tilted her head in puzzlement. She did not quite understand what Firill said.
Lisa and the others looked at one another with troubled looks. This was quite a sensitive issue, which was why they were hesitating on how to speak up.
Hence, I decided to explain.

"Iris, we Ds are people too. Of course, there are good people and bad people. You get this, right?"
"I-I get it..."
Seeing Iris nod, I continued.
"Although it's common for organized crime and terrorists to exploit the powers of Ds, there are occasionally Ds who take the lead to do bad things. Those Ds would be deemed disasters and become targets for elimination."
"Deemed disasters?"
It seemed like Iris was hearing about this kind of thing for the first time. This was probably the elephant in the room for Ds, or maybe it was intentionally withheld from them during class.
However, Lisa and the others seemed to be in the know, so they probably had heard rumors.
Sleipnir, which I belonged to during my time in NIFL, was designed to be a team for fighting Ds deemed as disasters. While I was still on the team, I never encountered anyone deemed a disaster but regarding matters on this front, I was probably more knowledgeable than Lisa and the rest.
"In other words, they are treated as dragons and not considered humans anymore. If the dragon is targeting someone like that, the situation will get very complicated."
"I see now... So there are people who actively decide to be disasters."
Iris said mournfully.
Back when Leviathan was targeting her, Iris had told me that she would rather die than turn into a dragon and harm everyone. Precisely because of that, she must have mixed feelings towards Ds who willingly gave up being human.
"But those people are an extremely small minority. Because by coming to Midgard, their human rights would be protected. By accepting jobs to create resources, they can legally earn more money than they could spend in a lifetime. So anyone who knows to weigh risks and benefits won't choose to become mankind's enemy."
"...Hmm, yeah. If Basilisk really is targeting a D, I hope she isn't a bad person."
Iris spoke as though saying a prayer.
I agreed completely.
If the person targeted by the dragon was a deemed disaster, she might even meet up with Basilisk after fleeing.
However... Just as Shinomiya-sensei said, right now, there was nothing we could do.
Imagining a serious incident happening somewhere far away at the moment, I prayed in my heart at the same time, hoping things would not develop into the worst-case scenario.

Part 5

Directly in hindsight, the worst-case scenario we were worrying about—an increase in the number of Basilisks—was finally avoided thanks to NIFL's action.
But presented before our eyes was an outcome no one predicted.
"—This time, we have new comrades joining us. After a blanket search in the towns ahead of Basilisk's advancing direction, NIFL discovered and took two Ds into protective custody."
On the Friday that happened to be one week after the health examination, a full-school assembly was held in the school gym.
Seeing Mitsuki standing there on the podium, I could not help but recall the scene when I first transferred in.
Perhaps this kind of gathering occurred whenever any newcomers arrived, so as to introduce them to the whole student body.
"Of the two, one of them has already been confirmed to have a dragon mark whose color changed. Now, it is almost completely certain that Basilisk's goal is to make contact with the D."
Listening to Mitsuki's speech, the students whispered to one another, but their gazes were not directed at Mitsuki but the newly joined Ds behind her.
"However, theres is no cause for panic. Basilisk's bodily structure is unsuitable for moving in water, hence crossing the sea ought to be rather difficult. Even if Basilisk could advance in the sea as quickly as it does on land, its speed is still extremely slow. It will probably take at least a month to reach Midgard."
Mitsuki should have noticed the situation in the crowd but she continued explaining calmly.
Although I was not optimistic enough to think that things were fine with Basilisk unable to cross the sea, Midgard seemed like it might be in a safe zone.
"We have ample time to make preparations. In addition, since Basilisk is the target we have been planning to vanquish since a long time ago, so long as everyone puts in their full effort, I am certain we will be victorious!"
Mitsuki's speech was astute as ever. But given the situation today, it was hard to say that she had convinced the crowd.
As a boy, all eyes were on me when I first transferred here, but the situation now was even more severe than last time.
Because of the newcomer Ds on the podium, one of them was too unusual.

"—Then allow me to introduce the transfer students. Please step forward, the two of you."
Two transfer students walked forward as instructed.
One was a glasses-wearing girl who gave off a serious impression. Similar in age as me, she had her long black hair woven into one braid hanging behidn her.
She looked like a very ordinary girl, but the problem was the other person.
All students' gazes were gathered on a little girl, probably even younger than Ren. If this was Japan, she looked like she would still be studying in elementary school.
Lacking in pigment, her pretty hair looked faintly pink due to the light. With snow-white skin and exquisite facial features, anyone would consider her a lovely young girl on these aspects alone.
However, there was one part which humans could not have.
She had two little horns, growing on the left and right sides of her head respectively.
Those horns were crimson in color. Their shape reminiscent of dragons.
Under the illumination overhead, they glowed faintly.
The girl with horns on her head gazed at us with red eyes.
—Are those horns not fake?
Dragon girl. This girl's appearance could only be described with that. With gazes of curiosity and fear, the crowd was staring at her.
What on earth were those horns? Including me, all the students gathered in the gym were waiting for the explanation about her.
But instead of introducing the dragon girl first, Mitsuki pointed at the glasses wearing girl with black hair.
"This is Tachikawa Honoka-san. I am told that her D powers only awakened recently, so please guide her generously, everyone."
"My name is Tachikawa Honoka, pleased to meet everyone."
The glasses wearing girl—Tachikawa Honoka—took a deep bow. She looked Japanese. NIFL was searching around what was Basilisk's original territory, in other words, the region near the Sahara Desert... But there must be some reason explaining this.
In response to the applause, Tachikawa-san smiled as though feeling relieved.
Then Mitsuki finally shifted her gaze towards the horned girl.
Instantly, the applause stopped. The air went tense and even the sound of people gulping sounded extra loud.
"Next, this is Tia Lightning-san. She is the girl who has caught Basilisk's eye."
Below the podium, the crowd went clamored. This girl was apparently the one whose dragon mark had changed color.
Once targeted by a dragon, a D's dragon mark would change color. Once contact was made with that dragon, the D would turn into a dragon of the

same type. The girl—Tia—her appearance, did it have any relation to that phenomenon?
Most students were probably wondering that. Mitsuki seemed to understand this. Once the clamor subsided, she continued to explain:
"In order to prevent unnecessary speculation and misunderstandings, I shall tell everyone this first. There is no causal relationship between a dragon mark changing color and Tia-san's horns. After detailed inquiry and examination, we have ascertained that these horns existed before her dragon mark changed color. Created through dark matter transmutation, the horns were added postnatally. Also, no abnormalities were found in her DNA."
Hearing that, the students went into an even greater clamor.
Creating a new part connected to the body—This sounded simple.
Since dark matter could be transmuted into any substance, in theory, it was possible to perform biogenic transmutations.
However, doing it in practice was another matter.
Because a living organism's body was too complicated, it was not something that could be recreated by imagination alone.
On the first day I transferred into school, everyone was surprised by my gun creation, but the difficulty of this far exceeded that of my gun.
The surrounding students were staring at Tia in disbelief. However, I could feel that everyone's fear for the girl of unknown origins had thinned out greatly.
This was probably thanks to Mitsuki's explanation working.
Although humans felt fear towards the unknown, conversely, as long as they could understand, they would not act with unnecessary wariness.
Just a bit more and Tia would probably be accepted by this school, just like me that time.
Mitsuki continued her speech for this purpose:
"Tia-san simply possesses a rare talent. She is no different from us. We are all human, so—"
"Wrong."
However, someone interrupted Mitsuki.
The speaker was Tia. Her voice sounded like a bell, high pitched and clear.
Everyone's gaze in the gym shifted towards her.
"Uh... Tia-san, did I say something wrong?"
Mitsuki asked her with a troubled expression. Tia nodded.
"Yes, Tia isn't human."
Tia spoke in slightly choppy Japanese.
Immediately, a whispering commotion began between the students.
"N-Nothing of that sort. Tia-san, you are human!"
"No, you're wrong, Tia is—a dragon."
"What...?"
Seeing Mitsuki rendered speechless with surprise, Tia tilted her head in puzzlement.

"Why so surprised? You are clearly a D. Ds are dragons."
"Ds are dragons...? No, that is wrong, Tia-san. We are humans."
Mitsuki spoke as though teaching her, but Tia made a stiff expression.
"...Dragon, Tia is a dragon!"
Tia glared angrily at Mitsuki. Numerous particles of dark matter appeared in her surroundings like bubbles.
—Crap!
Ds from outside did not use fictional armaments. Like what I did in the past, their usual method was to transmute dark matter directly. Hence, she had entered a combat stance completely.
Tia's dark matter was probably being transmuted into electrical currents. Sparks were scattering all over the place.
Perhaps due to emotional turbulence, she had unintentionally performed an offensive transmutation.
But despite facing such a clearly dangerous situation, Mitsuki and the other students were simply stunned on the spot.
This was because Midgard did not do any training on anti-personnel combat, hence they did not know how to handle this.
—!
I rushed out of formation and ran towards Mitsuki.
"Mononobe?"
Although I heard Iris' surprised cry, I had no time to respond to her. I used my momentum to jump onto the podium, inserting myself between Mitsuki and Tia.
"Stop it! Calm down!"
Shielding Mitsuki behind me, I yelled at Tia.
"Ah..."
Immediately, the anger on Tia's face suddenly disappeared. Widening her eyes, she stared at my face and did not move. The dark matter that had been generated in a torrent all vanished into thin air.
"Hmm...? Hey, what's with you?"
Trying not to provoke her, I cautiously asked her.
"Ah—No way... To see you again here... U-Umm, are you also... Are you also a D? There are men among Ds?"
Originally stunned, Tia came back to her senses and asked me in a trembling voice. I felt that her way of questioning quite strange. Her reaction was almost like she knew me.
—Speaking of which, I might have seen this child somewhere before...
"Yeah, I'm also a D. Currently, I'm the only male D, that's all."
Unable to recall exactly, I could only reply to her question.
The instant she heard my answer, Tia smiled like a blooming flower.
"So glad... to finally see you again... You... It's you! Name! What's your name...?"
"I-I'm called Mononobe Yuu..."

"Mononobe, Yuu... Yuu... Great name. Umm... Yuu, Tia has something to tell you."
Tia stared at me with excited eyes.
Feeling that things were developing in an incomprehensible direction, I asked her:
"What... do you want to tell me?"
"Tia wants to tell you that Tia was born to become a dragon's wife!"
"A-A dragon's wife?"
I felt quite baffled by this sudden declaration.
Did she really mean that she wanted to become Basilisk's mate?
I thought if that were the case, I must do everything possible to dissuade her, but after hearing Tia's next statement, my mental circuits stopped working momentarily.
"So, from now on, Yuu will be Tia's husband!"
"What...?"
I was stunned in surprise while Tia hugged me tightly.
"Then Tia is Yuu's wife! Tia won't separate from you ever again!"
I could hear the shrill voices of girls, impossible to tell if they were cheering or screaming, as they entered an uproar together.
And because everything happened too suddenly, I could not keep up with the situation. As for the young girl hugging me tightly around the waist, I could only stare blankly at her slender shoulders and those tiny horns—

Chapter 2 - Innocent Pursuit

Part 1

"—Due to the fact that Tia Lightning refuses adamantly to separate from Mononobe Yuu, she will be taken in by this Brynhildr Class. Please get along with her from now on."
After the full-school assembly ended, Shinomiya-sensei made this announcement in a business-like manner during homeroom.
Tia and I were standing at the lectern together because Tia refused to leave me no matter what. Right now, Tia was hugging my arm with her eyes partially closed and happiness written all over her face.
This girl wouldn't be—the D whom I saved in the past, would she?
From her reaction that seemed like she had seen me before, as well as my nagging feeling of familiarity, this possibility was quite likely. But I had no proof and could not ask in front of everyone either.
If my hunch was correct and the matter of letting a D go free came to light, this would endanger Mitsuki's position in addition to mine.
"H-Hold on! Tia-san should be of an age that belongs in elementary level education, right? I doubt she can keep up with our curriculum."
Lisa asked Shinomiya-sensei with a troubled look.
"That's true indeed... But her declaration, appearance and offensive attitude has made many students afraid. Even if she were to be forced together with other Ds in her age group, it's probably impossible for them to get along peacefully. In that case, leaving her to Mononobe Yuu, the only one whom she opens her heart to, is the better solution."
—Leaving her to me?
I had a bad feeling about the way she phrased that.
"So here is how it goes, Mononobe Yuu. You will be in charge of her education. Basic studies, common sense, rules for living in Midgard, you will teach all of that to her."
"What...? I-I'm gonna teach her? I only arrived in Midgard a month myself, you know?"
I argued anxiously but Shinomiya-sensei's tone of voice forbade me from refusing.
"Ask other people if you run into difficulties. You may regard this as a mission associated with the anti-Basilisk battle. If she causes serious trouble in Midgard, then the only option would be to hand her over to NIFL. What this means... You probably understand."

Ds must be appropriately managed under Midgard in order for their human rights to be recognized officially. Getting exiled from Midgard would be equivalent to being deemed a disaster, which meant that NIFL was going to dispose of her mercilessly in order to take care of the current incident. Just like when Leviathan attacked, they intended to kill Iris whose dragon mark had changed color.
"……I got it. Although I'm not confident, I'll try my best."
For a newbie like me, the responsibilities of this mission were way too heavy.
But I could not leave the young Tia to her own devices. And for some reason, she harbored strong affection for me. My heart was not cold enough to be able to mercilessly ignore a girl like that.
"Hmm? Are you done talking?"
Tia looked up at me and asked. Despite it being a conversation about her, she paid almost no attention to it.
"Yeah, from now on, Tia, you're classmates with us."
"Really? Then we can be together all the time here! Where is Yuu's seat?"
"Huh? Middle seat on the last row—"
I pointed at the last row of the 3x3 arrangement of seats—The spot sandwiched between Mitsuki and Iris.
By the way, although I feigned ignorance the whole time, the two of them had been staring daggers at me since a while ago. Mitsuki's eyes seemed to be reprimanding me while Iris was pouting unhappily, glaring at me.
"Then Tia will sit there too!"
Saying that, Tia pulled my arm.
"You want to sit there…? If you want the back row no matter what, I'll swap places with you."
"No, Yuu just sit here. Come, sit down."
"…?"
At Tia's urging, I sat down on my own seat.
"Fufu, then Tia will sit down too."
Tia sat down on my lap with a plop.
"H-Hey?"
"So comfy."
Ignoring my distress, Tia leaned her back against me.
At this moment, Iris suddenly stood up from her seat. Probably reaching the end of her patience, she said to Tia:
"Hey Tia-chan! You'll get in Mononobe's way if you sit there. You should sit in an empty seat!"
"Muu… Who is this Onee-chan?"
"I am Iris Freyja, Mononobe's… friend!"
Iris introduced herself proudly but Tia retorted without getting intimidated.
"If you are his friend, Tia hopes you can read the mood better. Sticking your nose into a husband and wife's problem is meddling, right?"

"H-Husband and wife… Didn't you just meet Mononobe, Tia-chan!? It's me who's been close to Mononobe the whole time!"
"Wrong, Tia and Yuu were tied together by the red string of fate a long time ago. No one can break us up."
Saying that, Tia changed her posture. Wrapping her arms around my neck, she hugged me tightly.
"T-Tia, wait… This is very uncomfortable."
Previously, I always treated her as a child and acted generously, but with such intimate contact, I could not help but waver a bit. Feeling her delicate, petite and lightweight figure and her soft skin, I was forced to become aware that, even at this kind of age, she was already a girl. The fragrance drifting from Tia's beautiful hair was tickling my nasal cavity.
"—Tia-san, sitting in your own seat to attend class is a rule of this school's. Please follow it."
Mitsuki's acute voice was heard at this time. Iris instantly brightened up at the arrival of reinforcements.
Tia pouted unhappily and turned her gaze to Mitsuki.
"Again, you… will say mean things to Tia?"
Tia seemed to be holding a grudge about what happened at the full-school assembly.
"I am not being mean. I am simply bringing up the rules. Please do not cause Nii-san trouble."
"Nii-san? You're not Yuu's family, are you?"
Tia blinked in surprise.
"Right, I am Mononobe Mitsuki, Nii-san's younger sister."
"Aha… Then Tia has to get along with you, because the husband's little sister is Tia's little sister."
Tia put away her defiance and smiled at Mitsuki.
"…I do not recall having an older sister younger than I am."
"Hmm, then you can be the older sister, or do you want to be the mother-in-law?"
"We are not playing house here, please do not randomly reassign roles, seriously… Sensei, could you tell her off?"
With an exasperated look, Mitsuki sighed and sought help from Shinomiya-sensei.
"Yes… You are right, rules must be followed, but I fear that trying to make her understand this principle right now would be very difficult. Hence, please tolerate her actions for now as long as lessons are not disrupted."
"No way…"
Mitsuki and Iris both made speechless expressions then Tia raised her arms to cheer in joy.
"Awesome! Then Tia will stay quiet. A good wife doesn't make trouble for the husband."

Tia resumed her earlier posture and sat properly on my lap. With that, as long as she did not move about, I was able to look in front and manage to follow the lesson
However, Shinomiya-sensei cast her sharp gaze at me and said:
"Mononobe Yuu, let me state for the record. Her special treatment is only limited to today. You have to settle this before tomorrow."
"Ehhh!?"
In other words, I had to make Tia obey school rules within today?
"Ehehe!"
Tia showed a joyful expression while her legs swayed nonstop.
I looked down at Tia, my self-proclaimed wife. This was a mission harder than imagined, totally putting me at a loss what to do.

Part 2

After that, Tia still refused to leave for even an instant.
During homeroom, Lisa and the others introduced themselves but Tia was uninterested, simply looking up at my face.
"M-Mononobe Yuu... I shan't lose to you!"
This provoked a weird sense of competition in Lisa—
"...Lolicon?"
Firill was inspired with unsavory doubts about me.
"Only Mononobe-kun gets to talk to her, so unfair."
"Mm."
Ariella and Ren were looking at me with displeasure in their eyes.
Particularly Ren, whose age was closest to Tia, she had kept glancing secretly at Tia ever since class started, quite curious about her.
"Tia, why don't you talk to everyone a bit."
I encouraged her but Tia shook her head and refused.
"No need, if Tia had to talk, talking with Yuu is better."
It looked I was the only thing that mattered in her red eyes. Anyway, I had no idea how to persuade Tia unless I got to know her as a person. Hence, I decided to let Tia do as she pleased for the first day, the only time for special treatment.
"Hwah..."
Keeping her promise in class, Tia sat quietly on my lap. Although she yawned in apparently boredom many times, even sleeping very soundly during fourth period, she did not seem to be a child who could not be reasoned with.
During the lunch break, we went to the cafeteria together as a class, sitting around a table as before.
"Here, husband, say ah—"
But most troublingly, Tia continued to sit on my lap just as in the classroom. She was extending a spoonful of vegetable curry towards me. The gazes from not only my classmates but also girls in the surroundings were making me uncomfortable.
"...Yuu?"
Due to Tia's uneasy look, I had no choice but to eat the vegetable curry. Then I heard whispers all around. Bothered by the surrounding gazes, I almost could not taste the curry's spiciness.
"Fufu, we are like newlyweds."

Tia smiled happily and ate a mouthful of vegetable curry too.
Going with this situation, I was probably going to be labeled a lolicon tomorrow.
But to me, it simply felt like accompanying her to play house like a children.
Although she insisted she was the wife, I felt that it would be more accurate to call her a very spoiled younger sister.
"Tia, you've got stuff next to your mouth."
After thinking of it that way, I stopped feeling particularly bothered. In a natural manner, I used a tissue to wipe Tia's mouth.
"Aww... Thanks."
Tia thanked me somewhat shyly. From the eyes of an older brother, I found that behavior of hers to be very cute.
If the one sitting on my lap making me dote on her was Iris instead, I probably would not be able to remain calm like this.
Thinking that, I looked forward, only to see Iris glaring at me with a pout.
"Only Tia-chan can do that... Too unfair."
Clutching her fork, stabbed in the pasta with tomato sauce, Iris spoke in a low voice.
"U-Unfair? What's unfair?"
"I'm clearly your friend, Mononobe... Compared to Tia-chan, we should be closer... But I never got to do the say 'ah—' thing, so I have to do it too!"
Saying that, Iris wrapped pasta around her fork and extended it before me.
"A-Ah..."
With cheeks blushing, Iris spoke in a trembling voice.
I felt my heart starting to race.

"H-Hey, Iris..."
"...Mononobe, hurry, this is very embarrassing."
Seeing her plead tearfully, I opened my mouth despite the hesitation in my heart, but—
With a metallic clang, Iris' fork was deflected by Tia's spoon.
"Yuu is Tia's husband. You're not allowed to do that."
"I can, because Mononobe is my friend!"
Iris' gaze turned sharp. As though about to have a fencing match, she entered a pose with her fork, still with pasta wrapped around it.
"Hey, what are you doing?"
Sensing danger, I yelled at her but Iris made a thrust with her fork.
"Eat this!"
"You wish!"
Tia used her spoon to defend again, but Iris' first strike was a feint.
Stopping her fork halfway, she evaded the timing of Tia's parry. Getting past the spoon, she shoved the pasta into my mouth.
"Mmggg!"
The flavor of tomato sauce instantly spread in my mouth. While the fork was drawn out, the pasta was left in my mouth.
"Success!"
Iris cheered and made a victory pose.
"Oh no, husband is having an affair!"
Tia screamed in shock. Her voice echoed throughout the entire cafeteria. All the students present were looking in our direction.
"...Knock it off, you two. Be quiet in public areas."
Mitsuki spoke in a voice filled with rage.
Iris instantly shuddered then scratched her head apologetically.
"Oh, s-sorry, Mitsuki-chan... I was too impulsive."
"Tia was clearly not at fault..."
Despite muttering in her mouth, Tia settled down. Because Mitsuki was my sister, Tia cared about how she was viewed.
"Phew... Mitsuki, thanks—"
I was just about to thank her when I saw Mitsuki's extremely displeased look, forcing me to grind to a halt mid-sentence.
"—Nii-san is an idiot."
After saying that quietly, Mitsuki turned her head away.
Lisa and the others all showed exasperation on the their faces. In the end, the meal ended under an indescribable atmosphere.
And after that, there were problems aplenty.
Using the remainder of the lunch break, we took Tia around to get to know the campus. At the clock tower, I was just about to go to the washroom when Tia wanted to go with me, thus causing a dispute for a while.
Persuaded by Mitsuki, Tia finally agreed to let go of my hand, but she kept holler "Yuu, are you there?" from outside, giving me no peace while I did my business.

—As a side note, inside Midgard, there were only two washrooms I could use. As Midgard's core area, the clock tower would have occasional visitors from outside, hence male washrooms were available for visitors to use. The other one was the toilet in my own room at the dorm.
Later on during afternoon class time, Tia wanted to go to the washroom this time, intending to drag me to the female washroom.
I patiently convinced her, finally reaching a compromise where I waited outside while repeatedly responding to her calls.
In this manner, today's classes ended while feeling several times longer than usual.
But my mission was just beginning here.
"—Mononobe Yuu, I will let Tia Lightning live in Mononobe Mitsuki's dorm like you. Take good care of her."
During homeroom before dismissal, that was what Shinomiya-sensei said. I was in charge of educating Tia. After school, I had to oversee her studies and Tia refused to leave me, so this could be considered an appropriate arrangement.
Although Mitsuki's expression seemed quite unconvinced, she still agreed reluctantly.
"Nii-san, I still have student council work to do, so please return first. Although you will be alone with Tia-san temporarily... Under no circumstances should you do anything violating public morals."
"...I know. Could you believe in your brother a bit?"
I nodded with a wry smile and exited the classroom with Tia.
Using her tiny right hand, Tia held my left hand tightly.
Accommodating Tia's pace, I slowly made my way to the building entrance, but just as we reached the first floor's entrance, I noticed a student standing still in front of the school map.
It was a very obedient-looking girl, wearing glasses, with long black hair in a braid.
—Eh? I remember that girl... the one who transferred together with Tia—
"Yuu?"
Seeing me stop walking, Tia looked at me in surprise.
"Sorry, Tia, come with me for a bit."
Holding Tia's hand, I approached the girl.
If she was facing any trouble, I should help her, right? This was the spirit behind Midgard's founding. This was what I learned from Lisa and the others during the battle against Leviathan.
"—What's wrong?"
I asked her from behind.
"...Eh? Oh—"
She looked back, widening her eyes greatly after seeing me. Perhaps she was startled because I was a man.
To avoid making her unwary unnecessarily, I smiled and talked to her.

"I remember you just transferred in today, right? Tachikawa... What was it again?"
To be honest, because Tia caused me such a great shock, I had little recollection of her, even her name was fuzzy.
"Uh—Right, I am Tachikawa Honoka, you are... Mononobe Yuu, right?"
She nodded and asked in a confirming tone of voice.
"You know about me?"
"Because you are the only male in the academy, I soon heard rumors about you. And I saw you this morning at the full-school assembly."
Speaking of which, this morning I had rushed up to the podium to stop Tia who was acting emotionally unstable. Since I had done something so conspicuous, no matter where I went, there were always people talking about the topic of me and Tia. With that, whether she wanted to or not, she would surely hear my name.
"...Then we can skip the introductions. Tia, you know her already, right?"
I motioned with my eyes, to introduce her to Tia, but for some reason, Tia hugged my waist tightly and glared at her silently.
"Right, although I saw her for the first time at the full-school assembly, I still have not greeted her... But I did hear the student council president's introduction."
Saying that, she lowered her head and bowed to us.
"Yuu-san, Tia-san, pleased to meet you."
"Yeah, likewise here."
I smiled in response but Tia scowled and refused to answer.
"Sorry, how should I say this...? Apart from me, Tia pretty much treats everyone like this."
I frantically explained for Tia, but she smiled gently and said:
"No problem, I don't mind."
"Thanks, that would be a great help—Tachikawa."
"Just call me Honoka. I'll address you by name too."
She replied in a relaxed tone of voice.
"O-Okay... Got it, Honoka."
Slightly nervously, I changed my way of addressing her. Although she seemed introverted in appearance, her personality might turn out to be more approachable than expected.
"So, what are you doing here, Honoka? If there's anywhere you want to go, I can lead the way."
I looked at the map that Honoka had been staring at.
"No, it's okay. I was just trying to memorize all the locations because I'll be living here from now on."
"I see, so you're not lost. That's great. Sorry for disturbing you."
I should have minded my own business. I scratched my head.
"Nothing of that sort, I'm happy that you talked to me. Even just knowing that you are such a friendly person counts as a kind of encourage to me here on."

Although Honoka thanked me, what she said made me a bit concerned. Thinking more carefully, taking her around to familiarize with the campus should be what her classmates would do first. Perhaps there was not anyone friendly in the class she was assigned to.
"...If you have any difficulties, you can find my any time. I'll tell you my email address."
"Oh... Thank you."
Honoka smiled radiantly. After exchanging addresses, we bid her goodbye and walked out of the building.
During that time, Tia's expression remained quite unhappy. She gripped my hand tightly.
"You're both transfer students, so why don't you try to get along with her? I think you'll surely become friends."
I said that to her while walking towards the school gates, but Tia shook her head.
"No, Tia doesn't want to be near her."
"Doesn't want to be near..."
Compared to Lisa or the others, Tia was expressing a clearer attitude of rejection, baffling me.
"And Tia is angry with Yuu too. A married person should not hit on girls."
"H-Hit on? No, that wasn't what was happening just now."
Suddenly exchanging email addresses might seem like hitting on a girl, but the only reason why I told Honoka my address was purely because I worried about her.
"...Honestly not hitting on her?"
"Honestly."
"Okay... Then Tia won't be angry."
Tia's displeased look changed to reveal all smiles.
Seeing her mood improve, I breathed a sigh of relief. Although we were not a real couple and I was not obliged to explain to her, it made me feel uncomfortable to be saddled with a trumped up charge for no reason.
Then we passed through the school gates and headed to Mitsuki's personal dorm.
Although we attracted the gaze of female students along the way, after entering the road leading to the dorm, no one was in sight anymore.
We held hands and walked on the road along the beach. That alone was enough to make Tia smile contentedly. Bathed under the setting sun's rays, both her hair and her horns shone with red light.
—Tia Lightning huh...
Having accompanied her the whole day, I came to understand one thing clearly. She extremely hated separating from me.
Almost like a lost child.
She looked like a child who was finally reunited with parents, refusing to separate again no matter what. Most likely, Tia's affection towards me was

neither infatuation nor love, but an expression of emotions from the fear of separation.
Although that was possible, the correct answer could only be known by asking directly.
There were many things I wanted to ask but among them, what I needed to confirm most—the question I had held back all this time to avoid giving Mitsuki trouble—I finally inquired of Tia at this time.
"Say, Tia, have we met somewhere before?"
"Eh—Yuu doesn't remember?"
Tia asked as though she was struck by a blow. It looked like we really did meet before.
"Don't tell me... you're the D whom I saved on in a warzone before?"
I voiced my guess.
Before coming to Midgard, I had only met two Ds. One was Mitsuki, the other was the young girl I saved in a warzone without knowing her name. Hence, it was very likely that the girl was Tia.
However, since she was a D, she could also be someone I got involved with unknowingly, hence I was not confident.
"Oh, phew, good... Yuu didn't forget."
Tia seemed relieved. I had guessed correctly, apparently.
—Lucky I did not confirm in front of others.
Letting a discovered D go free was a complete breach of military discipline. Apart from that, because Basilisk's target was Tia, it had caused NIFL to expend a lot of effort.
I had no intention of fleeing from those responsibilities but I did not want to cause a situation that would cause Mitsuki problems.
"So you really are the girl from that time... You seemed to have changed."
The girl in my hazy memories was even younger and did not have horns like these.
"Really? Did Tia become more cute?"
She looked at me with excited eyes. I nodded in embarrassment.
"Yeah..."
Becuase the shock was too great, it was easy for the horns to steal the spotlight, but objectively speaking, Tia was a cute girl. In two or three years, she would surely become even more beautiful.
"Tia is—a cute girl, right?"
"Yeah, that's what I think."
I answered her question that seemed to be seeking confirmation, but for some reason, Tia made a sad face.
"Thanks... I knew that if it's Yuu, you'd say that again. Tia is so happy, but... It's wrong."
"It's wrong?"
I did not understand what was going on, so I asked her. But looking at me, Tia's eyes were emotionless, as though her earlier childishness was a lie.
"Tia is a dragon, not a girl."

I instantly felt a chill along my back. In the depths of those red eyes, I saw a dark color akin to that of dried blood.
"..."
I reflexively tried to tell her no but held my tongue before it came out. Even if I unilaterally refuted Tia's assertion, it would only end up the same as what happened at the assembly.
This was most likely Tia's berserk button. If I had to touch it, I would best wait for the next opportunity.
First, I should carefully find out—Why did she believe so strongly that she was a dragon?
"...So to you, am I a dragon too?"
"Yes, all Ds are dragons."
Spreading her arms, Tia said that.
"Why... do you think that?"
"Because we have the same power as dragons, we are the children of dragons, isn't this logical?"
We definitely possessed the same power as the black dragon—"Black Vritra"—the ability to generate dark matter. Because Ds were the same as dragons, they must be rejected—There were many radical organizations pushing such beliefs. Was Tia influenced by that kind of thinking?
"No, but you have human parents, right?"
I had seen her parents when saving her in a warzone. I thought that afterwards, they should be living together as a family of three.
"......Tia has no human papa or mama."
But Tia refuted me with an emotionless expression and voice.
"No? But back then—"
I frowned and asked but I felt mild trembling on my hand, forcing me to stop mid-sentence.
I had apparently broached a very sensitive issue again.
"Yuu, don't talk about that—Tia wants to touch the seawater."
Just as I was hesitating how to continue the conversation, Tia smiled innocently and changed the subject.
Tia pointed at the vast beach beyond the breakwater, pulling me, wanting to go there.
"...Okay, let's go down the stairs over there."
I gave up on the spot asking about her father and mother and took Tia down to the white beach.
I'll have to find a chance to ask again later.
"Wow..."
As soon as she reached the water's edge, Tia instantly squatted down and dipped her left hand into the waves rushing onto the shore. I also squatted beside her and watched her scoop up seawater with her tiny hand.
"You've never been to a beach, Tia?"
"No, Tia originally lived in a place without a sea. And after coming to this island, Tia could only look from a distance."

Saying that, Tia licked her fingertip, moistened by seawater.
"Ah... It's really so salty!"
Tia seemed quite moved and yelled excitedly. How should I say it? looking at her like that, I could not help but smile.
—I can't force this child to make that kind of expression.
When insisting she was a dragon, insisting she had no parents, Tia's face lost all emotion.
Tia's issues seemed to much bigger than imagined but I decided in my heart to help her resolve them bit by bit.
This started as a mission forced upon me by someone else, but after knowing she was the D that I had met in a warzone, I could not stay uninvolved anymore because I had to take serious responsibility for her.
If I had sent Tia to Midgard when we first met, at least she would not have ended up with this dragon girl appearance.
With my unoccupied right hand, I tried to touch Tia's horn.
"Kyah... It tickles."
Tia made a startled sound and huddled herself.
"Your horn has feeling too...?"
It really was like a part of the body. I could not help but gasp.
"Yes, it's very sensitive too, so Tia doesn't like others touching it... But it's okay if it's the husband."
Tia put her hand on my hand that was touching her horn, smiling shyly.
That sincere affection made my cheeks heat up involuntarily.
But just at that moment—I felt all my hairs stand on end.
"!"
Feeling a sharp gaze of murderous intent, I forcefully spun around.
Switching my consciousness to combat mode, I picked up Tia in one arm and extended my right arm forward to create the dark matter required for a shield.
However... I could not see any enemy in the direction I felt the gaze. There was only the breakwater and coconut trees swaying in the wind.
I sharpened my senses even more and searched for human presences, but there seemed to be no one nearby.
Hence, I lowered my vigilance and put my hand down.
—Was it my imagination?
Midgardsormr was already restored. It was impossible for NIFL to infiltrate again like last time.
Inside Midgard here, there should not be anyone who intended to resolve the situation by killing Tia.
Judging from this situation, anyone would say it was my imagination no matter who I asked.
But I had survived battlefields all this time through my senses. My instincts told me that it was too early to dismiss that murderous intent as imagination.
—Things had become not very peaceful.

In another sense, I must not leave Tia now.
"Yuu..."
Just as I scanned the surroundings with my gaze, lost in thought, Tia called my face with her face gone red. Speaking of which, in order to protect from enemy attacks, I was hugging her forcefully. Hence, I hastily relaxed my force.
"Sorry Tia, does it feel very uncomfortable?"
"N-No, Tia is fine, but sorry, Tia doesn't know what to do next."
Tia apologized.
"What do you mean by... what to do next?"
"Eh...? Next up is that thing husbands and wives do together, right? Although it's so sudden, Tia was frightened, Tia is prepared now."
"What—"
Realizing Tia had a huge misunderstanding, I could not find words to speak for a while.
"But Tia... knows nothing about that kind of thing. Tia is a failure of a wife. So... Husband needs to teach Tia. No matter what needs to be done, Tia will work as hard as possible."
Tia looked at me with moistened eyes, gripping my uniform tightly.
"Hey, no, it's wrong! I didn't mean that just now... B-Because there was a big wave, I was worried you'd get swept away, that's why—"
I would scare Tia if I brought up the murderous intent honestly, so I stammered a random excuse.
"...Really? Then Yuu was protecting Tia! Thank you, Yuu!"
The straightforward Tia believed me and thanked me with a pure smile. Although I found my reason quite contrived, she showed no signs of doubting.
Did Tia trust me so much because I saved her in a warzone? Or simply because I was a male D?
Still with no idea where Tia's affection for me came from, I could only turn my gaze away with an unsettled feeling, looking at the horizon where the sun was setting—

Part 3

As soon as we returned to the dorm, I decided to begin tutoring Tia.
I had already gotten materials appropriate for Tia's level from Shinomiya-sensei, so I took Tia to my room and placed the textbooks and notebooks on the desk.
Elementary school curriculum apparently aimed to teach students how to write by hand, so materials were paper-based. For me who usually relied on a portable terminal during lessons, the touch of paper and pencil felt very nostalgic.
"...You really have to sit here after all."
Seeing Tia sit on my lap matter-of-factly, I could not help but sigh.
"Yes, because Tia is the wife."
Tia turned herself and looked up at me, smiling with a nod.
"...Normally speaking, even married couples don't stick together like this twenty-four hours a day."
"Other people are other people, we are us. Also, we are newlyweds."
"No, now that you mentioned it, I don't recall us getting married."
I pointed out the most fundamental point.
"Ehhhh?"
Tia showed surprise.
Did I bring it up too rashly? I could not help but feel frantic, but she immediately smiled.
"Now that you mention it, we... still haven't held the wedding! Yuu, when will it be held?"
"W-When... First of all, Tia, we can't marry at our age, right?"
"Human rules have nothing to do with us, because we are dragons."
Refuted by these unexpected words, I was speechless for a while.
No good, human logic did not work on Tia.
I had to get her to attend class normally by tomorrow. What should I do?
"……Tia, about this issue, let's discuss it later. Now's the time to be studying. Come, open the textbook."
After thinking for a while, in the end, I could only postpone the issue to resolve later.
"Eh... Then it's a promise? We will decide on the wedding date properly, okay?"
"If possible, I'd like to start the discussion from an earlier stage than that..."

Let alone changing her mind, I felt that I was the one being gradually forced into a corner.
While thinking of ways to reverse the current situation, I started teaching Tia.
As soon as she focused on studying, Tia became an excellent student.
Reading passages from the text, she would ask whenever she did not understand any part, instantly absorbing the knowledge.
On the topic of languages, she was capable of using three languages, including Japanese, on the level of everyday conversation.
—It looked like she had a good teacher in the past.
Considering Tia's appearance, it was quite unlikely she was attending a normal school, but Tia was no less educated than peers from the same age group.
I originally thought that since her way of speaking Japanese was very child-like, her mental age was probably very childish too, but perhaps it was the opposite.
The tutoring went very smoothly. By dinner time, we had already finished what was planned for today.
At 7pm, Mitsuki had returned home and came to call us. We had dinner together in the dining hall.
"...Tia-san's education seems to be going poorly."
Seeing Tia treat my lap as her designated seat, Mitsuki remarked with disappointment.
"No, academics-wise, it's going very smoothly... It's just that teaching her to follow rules is very hard."
Hearing my answer, Mitsuki sighed.
"I understand. Then I shall take over education regarding rules, because I am the student council president, I cannot allow Tia-san to do as she pleases."
Thus, after dinner, Mitsuki started to educate Tia in my room.
However—
"...That is why, Tia-san, by living a rule-abiding life at Midgard, only through that will the world recognize our existence—"
"That is something humans decided on their own. Tia is a dragon, it has nothing to do with Tia."
"....."
Confronted with Tia's dragon logic for who knew how many times, Mitsuki slumped her shoulders in dejection.
"I now understand your hardship very well, Nii-san."
Mitsuki showed an exhausted expression to me, who had become Tia's chair.
"I know right? No matter how we try to make her accept rules, it just doesn't work."
I remarked with a wry smile, feeling as though I had finally gained a comrade.

"She is truly a formidable opponent... Time sure flies. It is already past 9pm. Time to take a bath and clear our minds slightly."
Saying that, Mitsuki got up from her seat, but froze after hearing Tia's next comment.
"Then Tia will have a bath with Yuu!"
"This came after all..."
Pressing her hand to her forehead, Mitsuki murmured quietly.
"Tia, I'm begging, could you take a bath alone? Like going to the washroom, I'll wait outside."
I tried to ask her as gently as possible but Tia shook her head forcefully.
"No! Tia wants to have a bath with Yuu! The husband has to be with the wife at all times!"
"...Why do you hate separating from me so much, Tia? I'm not going away, you know?"
I steeled myself and tried asking, prompting Tia to show a gloomy expression.
"No... If Tia is not at your side, you'll disappear for sure."
"Disappear?"
"..."
I did not quite understand what she meant, so I repeated the same word as a question, but Tia kept her lips shut tight and refused to answer.
Silently, she gripped my clothing, refusing to budge even if the sky were to come crashing down.
"Understood, then it cannot be helped..."
Hearing Mitsuki say that, I jumped in surprise.
"Eh? No way? You allow it?"
I really could not believe that Mitsuki, the student council president, would permit a mixed gender bath. When the fact that Iris helped scrubbed my back came to light, I was punished to write a huge number of repentance essays.
"Yes, but on one condition. I basically predicted this, hence I came prepared. Please wait a moment, Nii-san."
Saying that, Mitsuki left the room and soon returned with certain articles in her arms.
"What's that...?"
I pointed at what Mitsuki had brought and asked.
"Swimsuits and pajamas."
Mitsuki answered with a serious face. Figuring out what she meant, I frowned.
"……Swimsuits make it okay?"
This was quite a huge compromise on Mitsuki's part, I thought, so I confirmed with her.
"The swimsuits are school prescribed, so just think of it as entering a hot spring and there should not be a problem with public morals. H-However, because I am responsible for supervising, I must be present too."

Blushing, Mitsuki said something even more unexpected.
"What... You're taking a bath with us too, Mitsuki?"
"—Is there any problem? Do you prefer to be alone with Tia-san, enjoying a lovey-dovey bathtime together?"
"H-How could I possibly think that!?"
I frantically denied. However—I somehow could not stay calm as soon as the thought of taking a bath with Mitsuki crossed my mind. Mitsuki was my sister, so there should be no reason to be so concerned.
"In that case, there is no problem, right? I will enter the bath with Nii-san too."
...With Nii-san?
The central topic should be Tia, so her way of putting it made me feel a sense of dissonance. But due to Mitsuki's intimidating gaze, I nodded in agreement without pointing it out.
"G-Got it..."
"Very well, bath time it is."
Mitsuki declared with elation. Somehow, she sounded inexplicably happy. Perhaps she was remembering things from childhood.
—Eh? However... Did I ever take baths with Mitsuki before?
If we were siblings, bathing together as children should be quite normal. But no matter how hard I thought, I still could not find memories of that sort—

"Sure enough, three people in a bath is very crowded..."
Having changed into a school swimsuit, Mitsuki surveyed the bathroom and remarked. The form-fitting navy-blue swimsuit served as a perfect foil to emphasize Mitsuki's snow-white complexion and slender figure.
"This is a swimsuit...? So tight, it feels weird."
Tia seemed like she had never worn one before. With curiosity, she pulled at her shoulder strap.
What drew my gaze was the red dragon mark on Tia's thigh.
—Once targeted by Basilisk, the dragon mark would turn red.
It was white in Iris' case, which seemed to imply that the D's symptoms would vary depending on the dragon.
"...Nii-san, your gaze is very suspicious."
Just as I was staring at Tia's dragon mark, Mitsuki pulled me by the ear.
Naturally, I was wearing swimming trunks. It felt quite out of place to be wearing swimsuits in a bathroom, but perhaps due to the presence of two girls, there seemed to be a sweet fragrance drifting in the air.
This was a single room's bathroom, hence it was never designed to accommodate multiple people bathing in the first place. With three people inside, there was no space left for rinsing oneself. Mitsuki seemed to realize the same thing while staring at the cramped bathroom with a troubled look.

"Three people rinsing together seems too hard. Nii-san, please enter the tub first. We will switch later."
"Understood."
I poured hot water over myself to briefly wash away the sweat before stepping into the tub. Then I soaked myself up to the shoulders. As a result, the water level rose to almost overflowing.
"Ah, Tia wants a soak too!"
I finally had some space to myself but Tia jumped into the tub. With a massive splash, hot water spilled all over the floor.
"Hey, Tia-san, what are you doing!? You have to rinse your body together with me first!"
Hearing Mitsuki scold her, Tia pouted.
"No, Tia has to be with Yuu."
Saying that, Tia leaned herself against me in the tub.
"T-Tia, don't lean in so close."
The sensation of soft skin, transmitted through the swimsuit, was making me waver.
And left behind, Mitsuki stood there stunned for a moment before speaking in a determined voice:
"In that case... I shall join in too."
"Eh? H-Hey?"
Mitsuki forced herself into the tub. Naturally, since this was not meant to be a bathtub for three, it became extremely crowded. Everyone was pressed together while the tub's hot water flowed out.
Feeling something soft against my shoulder, I hastily changed my posture, but this time, my knee went between Mitsuki's thighs.
"Ah... N-Nii-san... Not there, please."
"S-Sorry."
Every move of the body caused friction between skin and swimsuits.
"Mm..."
Mitsuki exhaled hot breath.
"Ehehe, husband!"
Tia happily leaned herself against me.
Unable to move, I could only surrender to the two of them.
"Three people is too much of a stretch. Could one of you please go out?"
"No, Tia will not leave Yuu."
Tia wrapped her slender arms around me.
"...If Tia-san will not go out, I shall not leave either, because I am in charge of supervising... By the way, you two are leaning too close together."
Mitsuki kept pushing her body over, trying to get between me and Tia.
Her swimsuit slid down slightly, exposing the valley between her petite yet beautifully shaped breasts.
"Jeez, don't get in the way."
Tia resisted intensely, hugging me even tighter. This scene in the narrow bathtub was almost like a game of sardines-in-the-box.

"I-If you two aren't going out, I'm leaving."
To me, they were Tia, who was just a child, and Mitsuki, my younger sister.
I originally thought that I would not feel especially conscious like with Iris...
But I found it unbearable. Despite soaking in the hot water only for so short a time, my face was already too hot to bear.
"No! The husband cannot run away and leave the wife behind!"
But Tia pounced on me, refusing to let me escape.
"Tia-san will follow you if you leave, Nii-san, so the situation will remain the same. If you are leaving the tub, Nii-san, please wait until you warm up more. If either of you were to catch a cold, I would be to blame for failure in management."
Saying that, Mitsuki grabbed my arm to keep me here.
My body was already burning but Mitsuki's words and gaze had a kind power impossible to resist. Reluctantly, I sat down in the bathtub.
Then after roughly ten minutes—until the happy and excited Tia went dizzy from the heat—I kept enduring, left with no choice but to keep my mind blank to prevent unwanted thoughts.

"She is sleeping so soundly."
Looking at Tia lying on my bed in pajamas, sound asleep, Mitsuki smiled.
"...Now I'm finally liberated."
I exhaled deeply, collapsing completely in the chair in front of the desk.
"You worked hard, Nii-san."
Mitsuki praised me with a wry smile then sat down on the bed's edge.
After the bath, we changed into our respective pajamas and drank cold drinks to soothe our throats... By the time we realized, Tia had already started nodding off drowsily .
Anyway, we laid her out on my bed and she fell asleep in the blink of an eye.
"But the mission failed. In the end, I still haven't convinced her."
Most likely in class tomorrow, Tia was still planning to sit on my lap.
"Likewise, I have failed to teach Tia-san to abide by rules. I shall explain to Shinomiya-sensei tomorrow to ask for an extension."
"Thank you, Mitsuki, then I'm saved. However... Unless we find a way to resolve the problem of Tia believing herself to be a dragon, it's probably a waste of effort no matter how much time we spend trying to convince her."
Rules decided by humans were irrelevant to dragons—These words rendered all arguments moot.
"...To be honest, I did not expect her to be such a stubborn child at all. I was told that she did not resist at all, no matter when NIFL took her into custody or when she was transported to Midgard to be examined. Always expressionless, she listened obediently to others."
"That's such a far cry from right now."

Tia's face was always busy making all kinds of expressions. While spinning in circles because of her, I could hardly imagine such a description applying to her.
"Yes, like a completely person compared to what we saw of her during the full-school assembly. In the beginning, I thought she was reticent and obedient child..."
"In other words, your 'Ds are human' assertion was something Tia found intolerable, to the point of causing a drastic change in personality. Mitsuki, do you know what kind of environment Tia lived in previously?"
Mitsuki glanced at Tia after hearing my question.
"—Before lessons ended, I asked Shinomiya-sensei to tell me in as much detail as possible. Tia-san seems to be sleeping soundly, so it should be fine to discuss the matter now. Because there are things I would be reluctant for her to hear."
Hearing her say that, I frowned.
"Did Tia have some kind of traumatic experience?"
Tia's belief had similarities with D-rejecting organizations. I was worried whether she might have been captured by that type of organization at one point.
However, Mitsuki shook her head slowly.
"—No, it happens to be the opposite. Tia-san used to be worshiped."
"Worshiped?"
"Reportedly, when NIFL's team discovered Tia-san, it was in a military vehicle belonging to the dragon worshiping cult, the Sons of Muspell."
Hearing that name, I could not help but gasp.
"The Sons of Muspell... Isn't that the world's most vicious terrorist organization?"
So-called dragon cultists were polar opposites in ideology compared to D-rejecting organizations. They revered and worshiped dragons, the monsters transcending human wisdom, as gods. In a certain sense, it was only inevitable for new religions like this to arise in a world threatened by dragons.
So-called worship was a method to escape from absolute fear. Believing themselves to be apostles of dragons, it provided them with mental stability. Out of the dragon cults of this sort, the Sons of Muspell was the largest sect and was the most radical in their thinking. They launched terrorist attacks against countries and organizations that attempted to defeat dragons, obstructing them persistently. Naturally, Asgard and NIFL were also targets for them.
"Did you ever come across the Sons of Muspell, Nii-san?"
Perhaps sensing something from my bitter tone, Mitsuki asked me hesitantly.
"...Yeah, because they would sneak into countries where dragon disasters had occurred, trying to gain followers, so it was inevitable that they came

into conflict with NIFL. I have received orders in the past to immediately eliminate the D who is their leader as soon as she is discovered."
"Eh...? Their leader is a D."
Seeing Mitsuki's eyes widened from surprise, I explained to her.
"This was not disclosed publicly, but the leader of the Sons of Muspell is a D who had been deemed a disaster. Her name is Kili Surtr Muspelheim. She has killed far more humans than the dragons and is feared as a *witch* in NIFL. However, I've never met her."
If I met her, it would definitely turn into a killed or be killed situation. The reason why I could keep my hands clean was also because I had never encountered her.
"No way... To think a D was leading a terrorist organization."
Mitsuki's voice trembled, greatly shaken.
"The Ds' position in society would probably be endangered if this comes to light. That's why Midgard and other benefactor countries have engaged in information control. It's normal that you haven't heard of it."
"...But why would a D want to worship dragons? They are clearly our enemies."
Mitsuki asked in puzzlement.
"The dragonification of Ds is top secret, right? So they simply don't know about this... Or even after knowing it, they still want to become dragons."
"The former I could understand... But it is the latter, I find it incomprehensible."
"Well, who can understand how terrorists think? However... Judging from Tia's behavior, it's very likely that their organization knows about dragonification."
Tia said she was born to be a dragon's wife.
Those words probably did not mean marrying a male D like me, but referred to being a real dragon's mate like for Basilisk for example.
To increase the number of dragons, dragon cultists had indoctrinated Tia like that. Things made sense if that was the case.
"So the reason why Tia-san insists she is a dragon is because of that...?"
"Hard to say...? How should I put this? Because I don't think Tia is the kind of person who believes everything others say without question."
When tutoring her today, I came to understand that Tia was a smart child who always took initiative to ask questions about what she did not understand, trying to comprehend them. Always seeking knowledge with basis, would she unquestioningly accept those absurd teachings of dragon cultists?
"Indeed... The impression I gather from Tia-san is that she was forced to convince herself to believe rather than sincerely believing she is a dragon."
—Convince herself to believe... huh?
Indeed, throwing a tantrum in response to allegations was evidence of uncertainty in one's heart.

Humans sometimes worshiped things as gods, even when they were monsters like dragons, trying to believe the impossible. If Tia was believing herself to be a dragon in order to maintain mental stability... Then by doing this, what was she running away from?
"Mitsuki, were her parents by her side when they found Tia?"
I asked because I recalled what happened at the beach. Tia seemed to react quite strongly to the subject of her parents. Perhaps that might have something to do with Tia's condition.
"I have no idea. At least according to what I heard, there was no information regarding Tia-san's parents."
"I see... Then I guess I'll have to ask her directly."
I looked at Tia's sleeping face and said.
"She is already asleep now, so ask her tomorrow. Well then, it is time for us to sleep too."
Saying that, Mitsuki lay down next to Tia.
"Huh...? You're sleeping here too, Mitsuki?"
Seeing Mitsuki lying down in an unguarded state, I asked her in surprise.
"It is probably a bad idea to separating Tia-san from you while she is asleep. But that being said, I cannot allow the two of you to be alone."
"No, but this bed is too small for three people to sleep in."
"...What are you talking about? Nii-san, you are sleeping on the floor. Please head over to the unused room next door to move the bedding over. Nii-san, you really have been lacking in delicacy lately."
Rebutted with her cold gaze, I felt my cheeks grow hot.
Because the three of us had bathed together, I mistakenly thought that the bed needed to be shared between the three of us too.
"I-I know, I was just kidding."
I frantically explained myself then headed out to move the futon over.
"...Nii-san in the past would have suggested this kind of thing himself—"
Just as I was about to leave the room, I heard Mitsuki's murmurs to herself, lingering in my ear the whole time.
Had I really changed?
However, I had no way of telling whether the "past" Mitsuki mentioned was referring to three years ago or three weeks ago, before the battle against Leviathan?

Part 4

"...Nii-san, are you asleep?"
Inside the dark room, I heard Mitsuki's quiet whispering.
I had the futon laid out on the floor and had closed my eyes originally. I immediately fought off my drowsiness and opened my eyelids.
"...Not yet."
I answered briefly. I could not see Mitsuki on the bed from my position.
Faint breathing noises from sleeping could be heard, probably Tia's.
"The last time we slept in the same room like this, who knows how many years ago it was...?"
Mitsuki voice entered my ear, reminiscing about the past.
"I don't know either... Probably when we were small."
Unable to recall something so far back, I could only answer ambiguously.
"Yes... Because our rooms were separate. Perhaps... even earlier than that promise."
—Promise?
Not knowing what she was referring to, I frowned.
Mitsuki had brought up "that promise" so matter-of-factly just now. By the tone of her voice, she believed *I would understand just from her saying that*.
However... Why did I feel so troubled?
Just as I was struggling to find an answer, Mitsuki continued:
"Nii-san... Tia-san calling you husband makes you happy, right?"
"What...? How could that be true!?"
I denied frantically. I could not accept that even my younger sister suspected me of being a lolicon.
"Really...? The way I see it, Nii-san, you do not seem too opposed to it, right?"
"Come on, you..."
"Fufu, just kidding. Nii-san... the one you like is Iris-san, am I correct?"
Hearing what Mitsuki said, I felt my heart jump intensely.
"W-Why are you bringing up Iris now?
"No? Nii-san, you seem very conscious of Iris-san..."
Realizing she had seen through me long ago, I felt my blood rush to my face.
"No umm... Because a lot of things happened... I became a bit conscious of her... But it's not like what you think, Mitsuki."

Although for Iris, it was a show of gratitude, of course losing my first kiss to her made me conscious of her. But apart from that, I was not quite sure—At least, not quite sure yet.
"...I understand, let us assume that is the case for now. However... Please do not forget that inappropriate interactions between genders are strictly forbidden, okay?"
"Got it..."
I was quite relieved that she did not pursue the matter deeply. But after that, Mitsuki added something surprising.
"Still... If there is nothing inappropriate, it is fine."
"...Huh?"
I asked in surprise.
"Midgard does not forbid dating, so there is no need to hide your feelings, Nii-san, and no need to... feel bound by that promise."
Her voice sounded full of sorrow.
"....."
I could only stay silent, unable to say a word. I did not understand what Mitsuki was talking about.
No matter how I thought about it, I still could not understand what "that promise" referred to, so I was unable to answer.
So I did lose something?
I could not look away anymore. Clenching my fist, I accepted reality.
Three years ago, the price I paid for obtaining power was losing many memories... Even so, things about Mitsuki were the only memories I did not forget.
Three weeks ago, when connecting to Yggdrasil again during the battle against Leviathan, I also believed that I would not forget my memories with Mitsuki.
Although my childhood memories were fuzzy, I optimistically assumed this went for everyone.
But I had probably lost very precious memories.
The promise brought up by Mitsuki unsuspectingly, convinced that I knew what she was talking about, could not possibly be the kind of promise that would be accidentally forgotten.
"...Sorry, Nii-san, for talking for so long..."
Mitsuki apologized to me with wryness in her voice.
"No..."
I answered briefly in a hoarse voice. That was all I could manage.
"...Goodnight."
"...Yeah, g'night."
I suppressed my feelings and answered her. After the conversation ended, the dark room returned to silence.
—Things had gone beyond recovery. Back when I sought new power, I should have prepared myself that it could turn out like this.

Hence, what I must do was prevent Mitsuki from discovering I had lost memories, prevent her from feeling she was to blame, prevent her from feeling sad, prevent her from showing suffering on her face—
Warning myself that, I closed my eyes.
Hoping for sleep to ease the pain in my chest, I allowed my consciousness to gradually sink into the abyss.

However—my day of spinning around in circles because of Tia had not ended yet.
Late that night, I was roused by yelling.
"Where!? Where is Yuu!?"
"Calm down! Please calm down, Tia-san!"
Light kept flashing in the room with popping sounds. I frantically jumped up to see Tia on the bed in a panic. Bubbles of dark matter were surging forth, turning into electrical currents, sparking everywhere.
"Tia!"
"Ah—"
As soon as I called her name, Tia instantly stopped.
The flow of dark matter halted and the intense lightning also ceased. I stood up and turned on the room's light.
"Yuu!"
Tia pounced on me from the bed. I caught her tiny body.
"Thank goodness! Thank goodness! Tia thought... Even Yuu disappeared."
Tia rested her forehead against my chest and spoke in a trembling voice.
"Phew... I was thinking something might have happened."
Perhaps relieved, Mitsuki sat down on the bed, exhaling deeply.
"Tia, I'm here, so it's okay."
I gently stroked the two horns on her head to soothe her emotions.
I never expected her to panic so much just because she could not see me when she woke up. It looked like not moving her while she was sleeping was correct, but this reaction was way too sensitive.
"Yuu... Yuu... Yuu!"
Tia kept calling my name. I patted her on the shoulder and said to her slowly:
"Tia, what's making you so afraid? You refuse to leave me because you're afraid I'll disappear, right?"
"....."
Tia looked up but kept her lips shut tightly, refusing to say a single word.
"Please answer me. I'm worried about you, Tia."
I stared directly into her eyes and spoke to her. The very depths of her red eyes wavering, Tia spoke with trembling lips:
"...Yes, because Tia doesn't want Yuu to disappear... So Tia will protect Yuu."
"Protect? Tia, you want to protect me?"

Hearing something unexpected, I asked in surprise.
Tia nodded lightly in confirmation.
"Precious things must be protected personally, once they disappear... It's too late, impossible to get back no matter what."
Impossible to get back after disappearing. Too late.
Tia's words shook my heart. I realized there was a gap in my heart from losing that promise with Mitsuki.
—This girl had lost something precious, just like me.
"I see... I finally understand you a bit, Tia. Thank you for protecting me, but you're mistaken on a few counts."
"Mistaken...?"
Tia made a surprised face and cocked her head in puzzlement.
Now was the chance to persuade her. Since I knew what motivated Tia's actions, it was easy to think of solutions.
"Yes, I'm not so weak that I need you to protect me, Tia. I can protect my own life."
"But... No matter how strong you are, there might be even stronger enemies. That's why if Tia is protecting you, it will be safer."
"Well, that's not wrong..."
Tia's logic was correct. Looking at me, Mitsuki's eyes seemed to be saying: Nii-san, what are you doing?
Originally I thought that I could reassure her by proving I was not weak, but it looked like I had to change the conversation's direction.
"...But Tia, now that you mention it, no one will attack me here in Midgard. So there's no need for you to protect me so desperately."
There was nothing threatening my life. Rather, it was Tia who had people after her life. I recalled the feeling of murderous intent at the beach and continued my attempt to persuade her.
"Who knows. Perhaps some people pretend to be good kids but are actually planning bad things."
She was using correct logic to reply to me again. But this time, I did not back down.
"That's right, I can't say for certain there are no bad people, but Mitsuki and Iris are different. Even if it's just the classmates in our homeroom, could you please trust them?"
"...Can't do it. Maybe Mitsuki... But Tia doesn't know what other people are thinking."
Tia shook her head with a stiff expression and refused.
"In that case, you need to make friends with them until you understand them. If you can trust all of us, then you can relax in the classroom and the dorm."
"Make friends...?"
"Yeah, so tomorrow, try talking more to everyone, okay?"
Hearing my suggestion, Tia asked very uneasily:
"...Yuu trusts everyone?"

"I trust them. Iris is a very honest and upstanding person. Lisa and the others are people who step forward to fight for their friends. At least, I don't feel wary of them."
When Iris was targeted by Leviathan, Lisa and the others had fought to protect her as though it was the most natural thing in the world. They had said that classmates in the same homeroom were family and truly cared about her from the bottom of their hearts.
On the battlefield, humans would show their true nature. Precisely because of that, I did not doubt the truthfulness of what I witness on battlefields.
"If I become friends with everyone, Yuu will be happy?"
"Yes, I'll be very happy."
"...Got it, since Yuu... the husband says so, Tia will try it. Because Tia... hopes to make Yuu happy."
Tia answered quietly.
I could not help but exchange gazes with Mitsuki.
"Finally a step forward."
Mitsuki remarked with relief.
"Yeah... By the way, Mitsuki, is there practical training tomorrow?"
"Yes, third and fourth periods are for practicing normal powers, while the afternoon is a special joint drill in preparation for the battle against Basilisk. Why do you ask?"
"Nothing much, I think that practicals are different from lectures and there will be more chances to interact with everyone. Since there are that many practical lessons, it's perfect. Tia—tomorrow will be very fun for sure."
I said that and smiled to Tia.
"Fun..."
Tia's face showed inability to understand what I said. Head tilted, she yawned. She was probably sleepy again.
Then we switched off the light and went to bed again. However, it would be bad if Tia panicked again so I slept on the bed this time.
Squeezing onto the cramped bed with my back to them, I closed my eyes while feeling Mitsuki and Tia's breathing nearby.

Part 5

The next morning, the three of us went to school. Just as we opened the door to the classroom...
"G-Good morning..."
I gave Tia's back a push and she greeted quietly.
Inside the classroom, Firill and Ariella turned their gazes to Tia. The others had yet to arrive.
"……Good morning."
Firill closed the paperback in her hand and responded with a somewhat surprised expression.
"Good morning, what a wonderful morning it is. I'm so happy that you greeted us on your own."
Ariella responded with a cheerful smile.
Feeling those two's gazes, Tia hid behind my back, unsure what to do.
But this was quite good for a start. Mitsuki and I also greeted them good morning then walked to our seats.
As soon as I sat down, Tia immediately took her seat on my lap.
"Yuu... Did Tia do well?"
"Yeah, very well, amazing."
I praised Tia and stroked her head.
"Ehehe..."
Tia closed her eyes happily. Before she got along with everyone in harmony, this state seemed like it was going to persist.
I took out my portable terminal from my bag and pondered excuses to convince Shinomiya-sensei. Just at that moment, I noticed that Firill, whose seat was in the front row, was searching through her desk drawer.
Looking at her, I wondered what was up. But Firill took out a book from her desk then walked over to us.
"Excuse me..."
Rather than me, Firill was looking at Tia while talking to her softly.
"W-What?"
Tia replied nervously. Firill presented the book in her hand. A pretty girl was illustrated with delicate strokes on the cover. It seemed to be shoujo manga from Japan. Although Firill gave the impression of reading difficult novels all the time, it looked like manga was also in her strike zone.
"Here... I'm lending this to you, because I think that during class time... You're probably very bored."

"Is this really okay?"
"Yes... This manga is very interesting... I hope you'll have a look, Tia-san."
Tia looked alternately between Firill's face and the manga, then accepted the book timidly.

"...Later."
After handing the book to her, Firill simply returned to her seat while Tia looked down at the manga's cover with a perplexed look on her face.

Regarding Tia's special treatment, thanks to Mitsuki speaking on my behalf, Shinomiya-sensei agreed readily. Perhaps she already knew that a limit of one day was too difficult, but used this method on purpose to encourage me.
However, only Iris was unhappy, glaring at me from her seat as my neighbor.
"...Mononobe is my friend, right? We are the closest, right?"
Iris pouted and asked me.
"Well... That's true, I guess."
I scratched my cheek and concurred.
Excluding my younger sister Mitsuki as an exception, Iris was my closest friend indeed.
"In that case, I hope you'll let me sit on your lap too, Mononobe."
"Well—Absolutely not!"
The wonderful fantasy surfaced in my mind, making me hesitate for a brief moment, but I shook my head in refusal.
"Ehhh!? Why not?"
"Iris, you're not a child."
"...Mononobe is so stingy."
Iris sulked and turned towards the window. She was probably trying hard to express her anger but that pouting face looked very cute from the side. If a girl like that sat on my lap, I had no confidence I could stay sane. I really hoped that Iris could be more aware of how attractive she was.
I sighed and observed Tia.
Were it yesterday, Tia probably would have complained about the dialogue just now, but she was currently silently reading the manga Firill had lent her.
Based on what I sneaked a peek from behind, it seemed to be a lighthearted romance manga with comedic elements.
After class started, Tia continued to read the manga with full focus, occasionally shaking as though suppressing laughter. Apart from that, she behaved very well the whole time, but as soon as she finished the manga, she started becoming restless.
Then when first period finished, Tia pulled my hand and walked over to Firill's seat.
"Here, thank you."
Tia timidly extended the manga she had borrowed.
"...What are your thoughts?"
Accepting the manga, Firill asked. Tia answered with a blush:
"Great read! Tia is reading this kind of book for the first time!"
"...Really? That's wonderful."

Firill relaxed her expression slightly.
"But it ended in the middle, what a shame..."
"...It hasn't ended yet. Do you want to read the continuation?"
Hearing that, Tia's face became radiant.
"Really!? There's a continuation? Tia really wants to read it!"
Firill took out the second volume of the same series from her desk and handed it to Tia.
"...Here, this is Volume 2. Volume 3 and beyond are in my dorm room... I'll bring them tomorrow."
"Thank you! Uh... Firill?"
"...Sure, you're welcome."
Hearing Tia call her name for the first time, Firil smiled gently and nodded at her.
Listening to Tia and Firill conversing, the other classmates gathered around.
"Oh, you're reading that manga too? I asked Firill to lend it to me before, it's great. Especially later when the protagonist—Mmmph!"
"Mm!!"
Ariella was about to give a spoiler when Ren covered her mouth, stopping her.
"Seriously... Ariella-san, you really need to learn to show some tact."
Lisa remarked with exasperation.
Then gathered around Tia, the girls began to chat enthusiastically about things related to manga. Tia originally seemed afraid, but gradually joined in with excitement.
I was ignored on the side but did not feel offended at all. Just seeing Tia chatting happily with everyone made me satisfied.
—Simply by not rejecting others, she made such a huge change.
Tia was not taking active steps yet but unlike me, who had transferred in as a man, Lisa and the others wanted to accept Tia proactively.
At this rate, she was going to quickly become a part of the class.
—Or rather, judging from this situation, I could tell how wary they were of me in the beginning.
Although it could not be helped, but this difference in treatment demoralized me somewhat.
Thus, Tia spent the second period reading manga as well. Third period was a practical conducted at a training site, requiring us to change to gym clothes. It was the same vast underground space used for the Basilisk battle test.
Due to everyone having different areas of specialty, this was essentially a time for individual training, but Tia had to begin with the basics first.
"Tia-san's instruction must not be left to Mononobe Yuu who only transferred in recently. Hence, I shall teach her personally."
While everyone scattered in the training site to start training, only Lisa walked towards us, volunteering to be the teacher.

"T-Thank you… Lisa."
Perhaps thanks to the manga giving them a chance to chat for a bit earlier, Tia called her name directly and thanked her.
"Lisa, I'm counting on you."
Tia refused to leave me, so naturally, I had to join in the lesson with her.
"…Although I have no intention of looking after you as well, this cannot be helped. First of all, I shall teach you the key principles to making a fictional armament."
"Fictional armament?"
Tia widened her eyes, tilting her head in puzzlement.
"To perform transmutation more precisely and efficiently, we have to shape the dark matter into a weapon. This is my fictional armament—Gungnir."
Lisa extended her palm. Immediately, a golden spear manifested out of thin air. Instead of generating dark matter then altering its form, it seemed like she had generated dark matter directly in the spear's shape, technique that required substantial mastery.
"Dark matter is strongly affected by the human will. This spear can be considered my feelings during battle, the ultimate spear that can pierce and destroy all enemies—Hence, its attacks are the strongest, of course! Through this chain of imagination, you can increase the power of your attacks."
Holding the spear, Lisa entered a stance and said.
—Feelings during battle huh...
This explanation was very apt, perhaps I could use it for reference when making fictional armaments from now on.
"But this is merely the stage before battle. If you obsess over altering the dark matter's shape, transmutation would occur at that point in time. Hence, what you should imagine is the outline of the mind, rather than dark matter, to meticulously create your own form in battle."
"Own form in battle... But Tia has never used a spear or a sword and don't know what to use for a weapon."
Tia stared at her palms and murmured.
"This does not require martial arts experience. Just imagine yourself in a stronger form. First of all, please generate dark matter while imagining yourself wielding the strongest power. With that, the dark matter will naturally take form."
Tia nodded after hearing Lisa's suggestion.
"Okay.. Tia will try!"
Tia closed her eyes and began to focus. Numerous bubbles of dark matter manifested in her surroundings.
However, I should have noticed at this time. Just by thinking carefully about what kind of girl Tia was, I should have been able to predict what was going to happen next.
Tia's dark matter gathered together piece by piece, gradually forming a massive clump.

"That's the way, slowly, carefully, no need to rush."
Lisa watched Tia while speaking to her. But when the expanding clump of dark matter gathered around Tia's body, Lisa frowned in surprise.
—I thought things were finally on track. Optimistically, I thought that once Tia got along with everyone, soon enough, she would be fine even if separated from me, be it in the classroom or the dorm.
But the root issue had not been resolved.
There was a decisive gulf between Tia and us that needed to be bridged.
Tia believed she was a dragon, not a human.
With such a belief, what would result from her attempt to create a fictional armament—we totally failed to consider that.
The black bubbles of dark matter finally surrounded Tia's entire body.
"What... T-Tia-san?"
Seeing an even larger mass of dark matter, Lisa stepped back. I simply stared at the scene in shock, no knowing what was happening.
Raging winds were blowing with Tia in the center. Continuing to expand, the dark matter floated into the air.
Originally black spheres, the dark matter gradually distorted in outline and changed shape.
The spreading wings seemed to cover our heads, while there was a long tail extending out.
A tall body, almost reaching the ceiling of the training site, dozens of meters tall.
That kind of figure—A dragon's.
It did not seem to be a materialized dragon. Its outline was shifting unsteadily like a mirage.
However, minor transmutation had occurred on the surface. The dragon's entire body shone with red light.
Only then did I realize that this was Tia's fictional armament.
It was what Tia imagined as her fierce self, her strongest form.
"...Tia?"
I transmuted dark matter into wind and yelled at the red dragon floating in the air.
The dragon turned its gaze towards me.
Ruoooooooooooooooooooo!
The loud roaring reverberated throughout the training site. Then immediately, a thunderstorm swept through the entire surroundings.

Chapter 3 - Calamitous Flames of Muspelheim

Part 1

The girl stared blankly, sitting collapsed in front of a pile of white ash. Without crying audibly, her tears flowed nonstop.
The home where she had been living happily had turned into ash completely. On the floor were fragments of window glass that had melted then solidified into round shapes.
Black smoke was billowing from the fields whose harvest were originally looked forward to.
—The happiness she had finally obtained... The happiness which that person had given her, all of it disappeared.
Filled with irrepressible sorrow, the girl could only shed tears nonstop.
"You don't need to be sad, because *it* was not real."
This was what the fire witch, responsible for everything, told the girl. With icy eyes, she looked down at the white ash on the ground. Then fluttering her smoking black coat, she walked towards the despairing girl.
"Not... real?"
Not understanding, the girl asked hoarsely. The hot air in the surroundings was making her mouth dry.
"Yes, because you're not human. Abandon all that old and fake stuff to become the real you. Oh right—Let me give you a new name."
Saying that, the witch placed her hand on the girl's head. Frightened, the girl huddled herself in fear.
"From now on, you will be called Tia. Tia as in *Tiamat*, the name of the silver dragon that Marduk vanquished in the past. You have great potential and will surely become something worthy of that name."
Written off as not human, receiving the name of Tia, the girl trembled and asked the witch:
"...What am I?"
"Tia, you are a *dragon*."
Hearing the girl's question, the witch replied in a forceful tone of voice.
"Dragon..."
"Indeed, and our mother is 'Black' Vritra. You have not lost anything. Even now, our mother continues to watch over us."
The girl widened her eyes.
"...Mama?"
"Yes, as a *dragon*, Tia, you are not alone, because you have a mother and many sisters."

Feeling a sense of solitude impossible to bury, the girl could only rely on the witch's whispers.
Even though she knew it was wrong—

Part 2

Having deployed a dragon-shaped fictional armament, Tia's gigantic body was making the spacious underground training site look like a cramped cage. Hovering in midair, the massive body had a destructive storm swirling around it.
Countless lightning strikes were tearing into the training site's inner walls. The fierce wind was sealing our movements.
Just as Lisa lost balance from the strong wind, a bolt of lightning descended upon her.
"Lisa!"
I was nearby so I slammed myself against Lisa to help her evade the lightning. Immediately finding my face buried in a soft sensation, making me unable to breathe, I moved my head. A sweet fragrance instantly filled my nostrils. Even my ears heard a seductive voice.
"Mmm.... No... M-Mononobe Yuu! W-Where, where do you think you're touching!?"
"Oh... S-Sorry!"
Realizing I had my face in Lisa's voluptuous bosom, I frantically separated from her.
"N-Normally speaking, I would have punished you mercilessly by now, understand? However... Since you seem to have rescued me this time, I shan't pursue the matter..... Thank you."
Blushing, Lisa thanked me quietly.
"Wow, Lisa thanking me, it's gonna rain today, no wait... A storm is already blowing."
To prevent myself from getting blown away by the strong wind, I lowered my posture while looking up at Tia who had become the eye of the storm.
"...What on earth is happening? That dragon is Tia-san... isn't it?"
"Yeah, it must be Tia's fictional armament. If by tracing out the 'outline of the mind,' Tia created that kind of fictional armament... Then perhaps she totally believes she's a dragon right now."
When I thought of it that way, it could explain why she suddenly went out of control.
"I-If that is the case, we must hurry to bring her back to normal!"
"Yeah—But how to get close...?"
Raging wind and lightning were ravaging the surroundings. On the other hand, Tia was hovering ten-odd meters above the floor.

"Mononobe!"
Just as I was wondering how to approach Tia, I heard Iris' voice. At the same time, the wind blowing us suddenly stopped.
I looked back to see Iris and Firill. Since they were training relatively nearer to us, they had come over to assist us.
Firill lifted the fictional grimoire shaped from her dark matter. She probably performed air transmutation to create a barrier of wind.
No longer suffering from the storm's pressure, I now had the luxury of observing my surroundings. I could see Mitsuki, Ren and Ariella gathered around Shinomiya-sensei next to wall on the far end. From what I could see, they were probably using transmuted air to neutralize the wind like Firill. Since they were too far away, it was impossible to join forces with them.
"...Are you two alright?"
Firill asked us.
"Yeah, we're alright but... Tia's a messy situation. Can you two help me?"
"...Sure."
Firill nodded.
"Yes, of course! Mononobe, what should I do?"
Iris nodded vigorously and sought my directions.
"Firill, try to expand the wind barrier as much as possible. And Iris, I want you to make explosions to divert Tia's attention."
"Got it, I'll try!"
Saying that, Iris manifested her fictional armament—Caduceus.
"—Mononobe Yuu, then I shall be heading over to Tia-san."
Raising her Gungnir, Lisa turned her gaze to Tia above.
"No wait, it's better if I reached to Tia."
"True that may be... But can you fly?"
Lisa looked at me uneasily. The method of using wind to fly required created a huge amount of air through transmutation.
My dark matter generating capacity was extremely low compared to everyone else, which meant I could not use that method. However—
"If it's just that kind of height, I'll manage. Lisa, could you please create lightning rods in the surroundings to divert the lightning?"
"...No helping it, leave it to me—Rise, towers of steel!"
Four masses of dark matter were ejected by Lisa's Gungnir, turning into four steel rods in the air, then embedded themselves into the ground as though surrounding Tia's position.
The random lightning strikes gathered towards the four lightning rods.
"My turn!"
Iris pointed Caduceus' tip at Tia and started concentrating.
"Come, come, fragments of the Far Beyond..."
As though surrounding Tia, dark matter manifested in multiple spots.
"Iris, don't hurt Tia."
"I know—O raindrops, scatter!"
Transmuted into water, the dark matter all exploded together.

Iris possessed the special talent that made everything explode no matter what she transmuted. Furthermore, she had high-level spatial awareness, allowing her to aim at the target without deviation. Hence, the accompanied steam explosion did not harm Tia directly.
Ruoooooooooooooooooooo!
Frightened by the explosions, Tia used the dragon's stout limbs, formed from dark matter, to attack the steam shrouding her. But the limbs were worn down instead upon contact with the steam.
Eroded, the limbs rapidly recovered but it made me certain that this was just a dragon in nothing but appearance only. Before undergoing transmutation, dark matter was extremely fragile, vanishing whenever it touched matter apart from the person who had summoned it. In that case, touching Tia who was supposed to be inside should not be that difficult.
"Firill, just try your best... Help me to open up a path!"
After saying that, I instantly rushed towards Tia.
"Understood—Air Road."
I heard Firill's voice behind me. Then a favorable wind propelled me from behind. Firill's wind ran past me and helped me to block the raging wind coming from Tia. Meanwhile, Tia's attention was caught by the explosions so she did not notice me approaching.
While running, I concentrated my mind to manifest my fictional armament.
"Siegfried."
Appearing in my right hand was a mass of dark matter shaped like a large-caliber ornamental gun.
By using this fictional armament, I could fire dark matter as bullets, allowing me to perform powerful transmutations three times. After using three shots' worth, the fictional armament would disappear, but manifesting it again would create a huge opening, hence—
—I have to finish this in three shots.
Without slowing down, I pointed the muzzle at Tia above and pulled the trigger without aiming carefully.
"Smoke Bullet."
The fired bullet transmuted into tiny particles of dust and air. The red dragon was instantly engulfed by the puff of smoke. The countless dust particles wore away the dark matter, peeling off Tia's outer garment of a dragon for a brief instant.
—I see her!
As soon as the storm blew the smoke away, the dark matter dragon would revive again, but I had already captured Tia's location in my sight.
The left breast... The heart's location!
Arriving under Tia, I stopped running. This time, I aimed precisely and shot the ground.
"Air Bullet!"
Transmuted into a large volume of air, the dark matter struck the ground and exploded, blowing me towards the sky.

In this manner, I charged into the dragon's interior. Although my view turned completely red, there was no tactile sensation or feeling of resistance. Prior to transmutation, dark matter was equivalent to not existing and could not impede my advance.
"Tia!"
I yelled while reaching out with my empty left hand. My aim had not deviated, as long as I reached enough height, this hand should be able to touch—
After my fingertip felt a tiny sensation, I found Tia in front of my eyes. Her eyes were blank and did not reflect anything. As expected, she was not conscious.
Perhaps we were... the culprits for turning Tia, who believed she was a dragon, into a real dragon.
"Pull yourself together! Tia!!"
I yelled loudly while embracing her with my left arm.
"—Ehhh? Yuu...?"
The light returned to Tia's eyes as she called my name.
Then holding Tia in my arm, I started to fall, traveling through the dragon's body.
Seeing the ground gradually approaching, I aimed Siegfried downwards. This was the last shot.
"—Air Pressure Bullet!"
I used an explosion of air to cancel the falling impact. Landing lightly, I immediately check Tia's condition.
"Are you okay, Tia?"
"..."
Having regained consciousness just now, Tia still did not respond. She had fainted, her limp body leaning against me.
Due to manifesting such a gigantic fictional armament and performing large-scale transmutations continuously, her mind and body must be thoroughly exhausted.
"Mononobe!"
Iris and Lisa ran over to me. From the distance, Mitsuki and the others also hurried to our side.
The classmates all showed worried expressions. But amidst all this, only Shinomiya-sensei was watching us with a harsh gaze.
Seeing Shinomiya-sensei's expression, I knew that time was short.
Turning my gaze to Tia, who had fallen asleep from exhaustion—I steeled my determination to face off against the monster invading her heart.

Part 3

Although Tia had gone on a rampage, greatly damaging the training site, luckily, no one was injured.
Also because Mitsuki and I tried our hardest to intercede on her behalf, Tia's punishment was withheld for now.
However, Shinomiya-sensei also warned us that there would be no second chances.
—After all, the training site was damaged to the point that it required repairs before it could be used again.
Carrying Tia on my back, I went to the infirmary. Along the way, I recalled the pitiful condition of the training site, damaged from floor to ceiling by lightning.
Due to the severe damage caused to the facilities, the entire incident might have to be reported to Midgard's superior organization, Asgard. If further damage occurred, Asgard would definitely punish Tia.
—I need to have a proper discussion with her after she wakes up.
In order to help Tia become a member of Midgard, to become a fellow classmate in the truest sense, I had to make her a human.
I walked through the quiet corridor to arrive in front of the infirmary's door.
"Pardon the intrusion."
I opened the horizontally sliding door with a clatter, only to see that the person inside was not the school nurse who had looked after me on a number of occasions.
"...Eh?"
Staring at me in surprise was the girl who had chatted with me yesterday—Tachikawa Honoka. Dressed in gym clothes, she was sitting in a chair with her top lifted up, in the middle of sterilizing a wound on her flank.
"Kyah!?"
Honoka straightened her lifted top and turned her back to me. Originally frozen from excessive surprise, I also came back to my senses as a result of her scream.
"Oh... Umm, sorry! I'll wait outside."
Carrying Tia on my back, I was about to shut the door when Honoka frantically called to me.
"H-Hold on! Tia-san on your back is not feeling well, right? N-No need to mind me... Please come in."
"...Are you fine with it? Then pardon... the intrusion, okay?"

I felt as though someone had invited me into their bedroom. Stepping into the infirmary, I went to the innermost bed and unloaded the sleeping Tia from my back. Laying her out gently on the bed, I put a blanket on her before turning to face Honoka.
"Uh, looks like there's no one else here... Where did the nurse go?"
"Oh, the nurse is over at the clinic because there was someone with more serious injuries than me. She is currently treating that person."
"Serious injuries? Was there some kind of accident?"
Honoka's arms and legs had several pieces of gauze stuck to them. Before I arrived at the infirmary, she was already treating her own wounds.
"...Actually, I failed a transmutation during a practical. That's also why my classmate became injured."
She was referring to the student being treated at the clinic?
Honoka's class was apparently having a practical lesson at a different training site than ours.
"I see, although everyone makes mistakes... It must feel pretty bad that you hurt others."
"Yes... I will apologize to her properly afterwards. Whether or not she will forgive me, I don't know."
"That's true, no matter what the outcome, I think that's the best way to go about it."
Hearing me say that, Honoka smiled wryly.
"...You really aren't one to hand out comforting words, Yuu-san."
"Sorry, although I know that I should be encouraging you."
"No, compared to people who comfort others irresponsibly, I prefer someone like you."
I felt embarrassed by her description and scratched my face, looking away.
"—But anyway, even if there are other people injured, is it okay for the nurse to leave you alone, Honoka? I don't think there's a shortage of manpower..."
Although the school nurse was the only medical professional on duty, there should be other specialized doctors who were on call. To ensure the Ds' health, Midgard had a comprehensive medical care system.
"No, this really isn't anything serious... I offered to do the dressings myself because it's just putting on gauze after sterilizing."
Saying that, Honoka showed me the bottle of antiseptic liquid and gauze in her hands.
"But from what I saw just now, your wound is somewhere hard for your hand to reach, right?"
When she was sterilizing her flank just now, it looked like she was twisting her body in quite a forced posture.
"That's true... Some places are harder... Oh right, if it's okay with you... Could you help me?"
"Eh? M-Me?"
I widened my eyes greatly upon hearing these surprising words.

"Yes, on my back... Even if it's just this part."
Saying that, Honoka pulled her gym t-shirt up sightly.
My attention was drawn to her snow-white skin.
"Sure... If you don't mind."
Despite feeling troubled, I still approached her. I had learned first aid for the most part at NIFL. There was no need to falter at dressing a wound of this level.
"Then I'll apply the antiseptic. Are you really fine with this?"
Receiving the antiseptic and the gauze, I confirmed with her again. If things turned into sexual harassment after the fact, it would be too much to swallow.
"I'm counting on you, please... be gentle."
"O-Okay... Got it."
I gulped and nodded.
I walked over to the back of Honoka, who was sitting in a chair, and knelt down to treat her.
"...Mmm, ahh..."
Perhaps feeling some stinging, Honoka emitted inexplicably seductive moans. To distract myself as much as possible, I made conversation with her.
"Speaking of which, Honoka, you were discovered in the towns ahead of Basilisk's route of advance, right? You're Japanese no matter how I look, so why were you in that kind of place?"
I asked the question that had occurred to me during the full-school assembly. Honoka answered while enduring the stinging from her wound.
"My mother... Mmm... is someone who travels the world... Ah... As for me, I visit various places together with my mother."
"What an accomplished mother... Do you feel lonely, suddenly separated from her?"
"No... Our relationship is quite cold because I don't have a father or relatives... Mmm... In a certain sense, we stayed together because of circumstances, so it actually relieves me to become independent."
Honoka's reply was very calm and did not sound like a brave front.
"...That's so strong of you. Okay, dressing is done."
I examined the sterilized wound then applied the gauze, ending the treatment.
"Thank you, Yuu-san."
After Straightening out her clothing, Honoka thanked me.
"It was nothing. Well... Although it's embarrassing to say this, but from now on, you don't need to be so polite when asking friends for help."
"Friends... huh?"
Honoka's face looked like she had heard something unexpected. Her eyes were wide with surprise.
"Yeah, that's what I think. If you feel that I'm forcing things too much, then I apologize."

"No, nothing of that sort. I… am extremely glad."
Honoka smiled and shook her head.
"Great, then let's look after each other from now on."
"V-Very well, me too… Let's look after each other. S-So… I'd like to head over to the clinic to see how my classmate is doing."
Honoka lowered her head and bowed, then a little frantically, she walked to the infirmary's exit.
"Sure, see you."
I waved a hand in response. Honoka partially closed her eyes and smiled.
"Great—hope to talk to you again, then I'm off…"
She closed the door and the room suddenly turned silent.
—Hope?
Rather than waiting for chance encounters, perhaps I should write emails to her proactively.
Injuring a classmate might have repercussions for her. Although I might not be able to help much, it would be good for her to have someone to confide in at least. As her friend, I wanted to help her as much as possible.
Thinking about this kind of thing, I turned my gaze to the bed.
Tia was still sound asleep.
Zzzzzzzzzz!
But at this moment, the terminal for the infirmary's internal line played a ringtone and the call lamp kept flashing.
"…Should I answer?"
I hesitated and looked at the infirmary's door. The school nurse did not look like she was returning yet.
—Maybe it might be for me.
I had reported to Shinomiya-sensei that I was taking Tia to the infirmary.
Thinking it could be something to inform me, I pressed the pick up button on the screen despite my hesitation.
With an electronic sound, the screen immediately switched.
Then a face appeared on the screen, but it was someone I totally did not expect.
'Hi, it's been a while, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe.'
"…Major Loki?"
His name flew out of my mouth. It was the man who had been my direct commanding officer at NIFL.
On the other end, NIFL stared at me with his slender eyes. A gentle smile surfaced on his face.
'Until just now, I was still having a discussion with Colonel Shinomiya. Then I asked her to connect my call over to your end. Because I didn't even get a chance to talk to you during the personnel reassignment, I've been wanting to find a chance to chat with you.'
"Huh…? If it's chatting, last time—"
'What are you talking about, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe? Ever since you transferred to Midgard, this is my first time speaking to you, isn't it?'

Hearing him say that, I remembered this was a public ine.
When Leviathan was attacking, Major Loki had exploited the opening in Midgardsormr switching to interception mode and secretly contacted me through my personal terminal. This was to talk about things that must not reach Midgard's ears, because he wanted me to kill the D whose dragon mark had changed color.
"Right... Yeah, Major Loki, because I feel that working under you was only recently, I made a mistake."
Left without a choice, I could only go along with him. If any problems arose from what I said arbitrarily, it would turn into Mitsuki's responsibility because she was the one supervising me.
'Haha, me too. Clearly you're no longer my subordinate, but I still worry about you. I've got something to tell you. Want to hear it?'
"Yes... What is it?"
Staring at Major Loki's fake smile, I nodded. Since it was something that could be said on a public line, it should not be something dangerous like last time.
'The dragon cult, the Sons of Muspell, is apparently plotting to recover Tia Lightning. Although I've already asked Midgard to pay more attention, you be careful too.'
The Sons of Muspell... was the name of the organization that had effectively kept Tia under house arrest in the past. If they knew about the dragonification of Ds, it was not difficult to understand why they wanted to retrieve Tia, but—
"Recover...? From Midgard here? I think they'll get eliminated by Midgardsormr the instant they approach, right...?"
'Yes, Midgard's defenses are impregnable. But supplies and personnel need to enter and exit. Although there are stringent checks, it is not entirely impossible to get through. And this time, beyond a doubt... Kili will make a move too."
The smile vanished from Major Loki's face this time.
"That Kili huh..."
Kili Surtr Muspelheim. The leader of the Sons of Muspell, she was also a D deemed a disaster... Although I did not think she could penetrate Midgardsormr, she was quite a strong threat indeed.
'Kili is very strong, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe. Due to the information we received this time, alerting us that the Sons of Muspell had a D in their compound, NIFL mobilized all deployable forces. But the result was that Kili singlehandedly suppressed the majority.'
"The Sons of Muspell, are they doing this knowing that Ds will dragonify..."
'Arrested cultists did not seem to be in the know, but at least we can conclude that Kili knows. At the time, Tia Lightning was apparently just moved there from another facility. They probably intended to hand her to Basilisk as its mate instead of waiting for it to visit.'

In other words, Tia was originally in the process of being transported as a live sacrifice. If NIFL had acted slightly later, the second Basilisk would surely have been born.
"If they'll go so far to increase the number of dragons... I guess it's impossible they'll give up so easily."
'Indeed, Kili will definitely take some kind of action. If she infiltrates Midgard, a great disaster can be predicted. Please do not lower your guard at all. Considering that even Sleipnir could not handle her, she is probably stronger than you as you are right now.'
"...!"
I gasped. Major Loki had attempted to raise me as monster stronger than anyone else. Precisely because these words came from his mouth, I could understand how abnormal this D called Kili was.
'If possible, I'd really like to send out Sleipnir but Midgard won't allow NIFL to interfere that easily. Hence, if anything happens, 2nd Lieutenant Mononobe, I place my hopes you alone.'
"Clearly when Kili is stronger than me... You still have hopes for me?"
'Yes, even so, you are the only one who might be able to kill her. If there are people and things around you that you wish to protect, please abandon your silly obstinacy. This is my honest advice to you.'
Major Loki spoke to me with eyes that seemed to see through everything.
"...I'll bear that in mind."
It felt like my heart was being squeezed. I forced my voice out to respond.
'You would do well to remember that. Oh right, although this is pure just in case, I will send to your terminal all accumulated information regarding Kili to this date. Read over it when you have time.'
"Sure, thank you... for doing so much for me."
'You're welcome, I did this willingly. Also, Basilisk is still crossing the African continent. Things were sudden with Leviathan and NIFL was in chaos, but this time, we have plenty of time so you don't need to worry about unnecessary things.'
Major Loki spoke suggestively. Last time, NIFL had sent a team to kill Iris. He was probably hinting that no such operation would happen yet for now. But in that case, the murderous intent I sensed last time was...
"...I got it."
Although there were still things that bothered me, I nodded for now in response.
'Then it's time I excused myself. Hope to talk to you again—2nd Lieutenant Mononobe.'
Major Loki smiled sarcastically then the call disconnected, turning the screen black.
"Kili huh..."
I uttered her name softly in my mouth. During training, she was often used as an imaginary enemy, hence I had no hesitation towards fighting, however —

"Yuu...?"
Just as I was staring at the pictureless screen, lost in thought, I suddenly heard a voice from behind.
"Tia, you woke up?"
Perhaps my conversation with Major Loki had woken her up. Tia had sat up in bed, looking at me with a troubled look.
"Why is... Tia in this kind of place? Tia should be with Yuu training just now..."
"—So you don't remember? Including this, I need to have a chat with you next, but this isn't a good place to talk. Let's go to the beach, okay?"
Hearing my suggestion, Tia showed an expression of joy.
"Yes, Tia wants to see the sea with Yuu again."
Although the notion of bringing gloom to that smiling face pained my heart, I still took Tia by the hand as she ran towards.
The husband and the dragon's wife.
This ill-matched game of playing house—It was probably about to end soon.

Part 4

Tia and I first went made a trip to the classroom. After changing into our uniforms, we left the campus with our school bags.
Other people might be busy with handling the training site's aftermath. They were not in the classroom.
Since the practicals in the afternoon had been suspended due to the damaged training site, there were no more lessons today. Like yesterday, we walked along the path to the dorm, descended to the beach and took off our shoes.
"Wow, it feels like the sea can be seen clearer than yesterday."
Peering at the seawater from the water's edge, Tia jumped around, grinning from ear to ear. We visited yesterday near dusk, so the impression given off by the sea was probably quite different compared to the daytime.
The waves produced white spray, gently caressing our ankles.
Watching Tia stepping on the waves, I quietly asked her:
"Tia, compared to yesterday, do you like Lisa and the others more?"
"Y-Yes, Tia knows they're good people now."
Tia answered a bit embarrassedly. With Firill's manga as a trigger, through chatting with everyone in the class, her wariness had decreased somewhat compared to yesterday.
"However, just now, Tia... you almost injured Lisa, you know?"
"...Eh?"
Widening her eyes, Tia showed surprise on her face.
"Tia, you wanted to make a fictional armament but ended up in the form of a dragon and caused mass destruction. The training site is now all torn up by the storm and lightning strikes."
"N-No way... Tia did that—"
In a trembling voice, Tia shook her head in disbelief.
"I know you didn't do it on purpose. At the time, you weren't in a normal mental state, but it doesn't change the fact that you endangered Lisa and the others. So Tia, I hope you'll apologize to the others and promise you'll never do that again."
I bent down to speak at Tia's eye level.
"G-Got it! Tia will apologize! Let's go find everyone!"
Tia frantically pulled my hand. Like Honoka earlier whom I met at the infirmary, Tia was regretting her failure.

"...You're a good girl after all, Tia. But if things do not change, you won't be able to keep that promise. You'll probably repeat your mistakes, as long as you continue—to believe you are a dragon."
"Eh... What do you mean by believe? Tia really is a dragon. Aren't Yuu and everyone dragons too?"
Tia answered with surprise. However, I could see slight wavering in her eyes.
"No, we're humans."
"Why... Why does even Yuu say something so mean? We are dragons! Having this kind of power is the proof!"
Tia generated dark matter in the surroundings, transmuting it into electrical currents. Sparks flew with a sizzling sound. However, I stared into Tia's eyes squarely without backing down.
"Indeed, perhaps there's that interpretation too. Then I'll put things another way. At least for the Ds residing in Midgard, we are all living as humans."
"Living... as humans?"
"Yeah, so as long you insist on living as a dragon, Tia, we won't be able to coexist."
Tia widened her eyes.
"That means... We can't be together?"
"That's right, so that I hope, Tia... you can be human."
I proposed the only necessary condition for Tia to become part of the family that was Brynhildr Class.
"No... Because Tia is a dragon... With these kinds of horns, Tia is already not human..."
Touching her red horns, Tia rejected my proposal.
"It's fine if you have horns. To me, Tia, you're a cute girl and I think it's the same for Lisa and the rest.
"But, but..."
I explained to her gently but Tia kept shaking her head.
"Why do want to be a dragon so much, Tia? Please tell, what on earth happened after we separated in that warzone? What happened to the parents who were with you back then?"
"Tia has no papa and mama, they were... fakes."
Like last evening, Tia looked down with a stiff expression.
"Then I hope you can tell me about the fake papa and mama."
I placed my hand on Tia's face and slowly lifted her head, meeting her gaze up close
Her silence persisted a while. Only the sound of waves were heard reguarly. Tia's red eyes moistened and her cheeks blushed
"...Yuu wants to know about Tia that much?"
"Yes, because I want to be with you too, that's why I want to know.
Hearing my answer, Tia gulped then quietly began:
"...After being saved by Yuu, Tia and they went to live in another country."

What she meant by "they" was probably her parents. Refusing to call them papa and mama, Tia continued:
"They become more gentle than before. Even if Tia did not use power, they still smiled at Tia. Working outside in the fields was hard work, but happy too. But everything... house, fields or them... One day, they suddenly burned up and disappeared."
"Burned up... Was it a fire?"
"No, not a fire. What Tia met was—Kili."
"...!"
Hearing that name, my face froze.
—I never expected to hear Kili's name here too.
Tia had been imprisoned by the Sons of Muspell, hence it was not surprising that she had met the cult's leader Kili. However, I never thought Kili was the one who had deprived Tia of her parents and her home.
"Kili told Tia they were not real, so Tia did not lose anything. Tia is a dragon and has a real mama—'Black' Vritra. The many Ds in the world... are Tia's sisters. That's what she told Tia."
After listening to Tia, I finally understood what she was running away from. To escape the truth of her parents' death, Tia had no choice but to rely on Kili's words.
As soon as she admitted she was human, she had to accept the loss of her parents. In such a state, ordinary persuasion was not going to work on Tia. Trying to reason with her would lead to nowhere.
"—Thank you for telling me, Tia."
I thanked Tia and stroked her head lightly.
"Yuu understands... what Tia thinks?"
"Yeah... I understand clearly now. I won't say your thinking is wrong anymore."
"Wonderful..."
Tia looked relieved, but I immediately said:
"But I must correct what Kili said. As long as you're living as a dragon, Tia, you'll never be sisters with the Ds who are living as humans, you'll never be family with me, Lisa and the others."
"Eh—?"
Tia's expression instantly froze.
"This might be an unfair way of putting it, but please understand. At this rate, you won't be able to get what you want. Tia, I hope you'll choose to be human."
I could not refute Tia's belief. Even if I forcibly laid out the truth in front of her eyes, without the mental preparation to accept it, she would only end up mind broken. As a result, I could only hint towards future gains and losses and ask her to make a choice.
"Choose...? Tia doesn't quite get... what Yuu is saying."
"...True. I guess it's not something that can be explained clearly with words. In that case, I'll show you. I'll show you what you can do to become human."

After saying that, I took out my portable terminal.
"What are you doing?"
Tia asked uneasily. I smiled and answered her:
"It's still early and there are no lessons. Let's have fun with everyone next. If I say it's for Tia, I'm guessing all our classmates will gather."
"Why...? Didn't Tia do awful things to everyone? Isn't Lisa angry?"
"She'll come even if she's angry. Because all of us wants to become family with you, Tia."
Listening to my answer, Tia widened her eyes, rooted to the spot in a daze for a moment.

Part 5

After I emailed Iris and Mitsuki, asking them to let everyone else know, we returned to the dorm and changed into our swimwear. According to Mitsuki's response, they were going to come over in an hour's time.
I heard there was a set of beach gear in the dorm's storeroom, so Tia and I brought out a sun umbrella and plastic mats.
"Tia caused everyone trouble, so Tia has to work hard."
Dressed in a school swimsuit, Tia still tried her hardest to move one of the larger mats despite doing it unsteadily.
With preparations basically complete. I was giving Tia swimming lessons in the shallows when the first classmate arrived.
"Mononobe!"
Iris ran over while waving, dressed in a white bikini. With every step she ran, that lovely bosom would bounce accordingly.
"Wow..."
I felt my heart flutter, worrying whether that swimsuit, tied by flimsy strings, would stay on.
Iris arrived in front of us and twirled around to show us. With her silver hair fluttering, bathed under the sunlight, her pale complexion looked extremely dazzling.
"How is it? I lost my previous swimsuit, so I bought a new one!"
"...Looks amazing. Speaking of which, Iris, the first time we met, you said your swimsuit got washed away."
I thought back to my first encounter with Iris. Thanks to that—No wait, unfortunately due to that—I saw Iris' naked body and got attacked by her.
"Yeah, but in the end, I still couldn't find it—No wait, s-stop thinking about that time, you're embarrassing me..."
Iris blushed and shielded her bosom with her arms. But that posture of hers made me even more conscious of her. Mesmerized by the sight of Iris in her white swimsuit, it took me a while before I could mutter:
"—Iris really is so pretty."
Whether back then or right now, Iris was so beautiful that I could say such words naturally.
"Wha... W-W-W-What... If you suddenly say something like that to me, I'll..."
Iris blushed all the way to her neck and sat down on the beach all of a sudden.
"H-Hey, are you okay?"

Worried, I extended my hand but Tia circled around in front of me as though trying to block me.
"Yuu, what about Tia? How's Tia's swimsuit?"
"Hmm? Yeah, you're very cute, Tia."
I answered honestly but for some reason, she pouted and glared at Iris unhappily.
"Tia finally... gets it, you—Iris—are Tia's rival!"
Confronted with Tia's pointing finger, Iris cocked her head in surprise and puzzlement.
"Rivals? Me and you, Tia?"
"That's right, Tia... won't lose to you!"
"I don't quite get it, but you want to compete against me, right? Well... Okay, how about we play the stick-in-the-sand game?"
Smiling, Iris gathered sand to make a small mound.
"Stick-in-the-sand?"
"Yes. You play this game by making a mound of sand like this... Then put on a stick on top. We take turns digging the mound and whoever makes the stick fall over loses."
Iris picked up a twig that had fallen by the water's edge and planted it on top of the sand before explaining the rules to Tia.
"G-Got it, Tia accepts... this match."
Tia nodded with a serious expression then started playing the game with Iris.
It felt like they had totally strayed from the original point, but I watched them play without interrupting.
At this time, Lisa, Firill, Ariella and Ren arrived as well.
"As reluctant as I am to let you see my swimsuit, I still forced myself to come."
Wearing a mature-looking black swimsuit, Lisa tossed her hair as she spoke to me.
"...Despite what you said, I think you were selecting your swimsuit very seriously."
Firill quipped quietly. She was dressed in a two-piece blue swimsuit.
"B-Because sun protection is a nuisance and I don't often go to the beach, that was why I had to agonize over which swimsuit to wear! I-I was certainly not concerned about Mononobe Yuu's gaze, got that?"
Lisa frantically explained herself to Firill.
Both girls had bigger busts than Iris and their swimsuits made their cleavage visible. That overwhelming volume, normally hidden under their uniforms, was currently shaking the core of my brain.
"Haha—Lisa is not upfront as usual. With a man's gaze present, anyone would care more or less."
Speaking wryly was Ariella in a tropical print swimsuit. Wearing a one-piece frilly swimsuit, Ren was hiding behind her.
"...Mm."

Like a small animal, Ren stared warily at me. Faced with such strong thoughts, I felt quite uncomfortable too.
"Uh... Everyone looks great in their swimsuit."
To soothe the indescribably tense atmosphere, I offered my comment. It was not a lie, because objectively speaking, all the girls in Brynhildr Class were very attractive... To the point that I had no idea where I should be looking.
"O-Of course! I know without needing you to tell me."
Lisa scowled and turned her head away to respond.
"...Thank you for your praise."
Firill thanked me without changing expressions.
"Umm, t-there's no need to... flatter me."
Ariella was normally calm and rational, but would lose composure as soon as anyone praised her. Her gaze drifted all over the place aimlessly.
"……Mm."
The shy Ren was blushing, hiding completely behind Ariella.
"...Nii-san, what you said just now could almost be construed as sexual harassment."
Last to appear was Mitsuki, staring coldly at me.
She apparently made a trip back to the dorm. There was an inflated beach ball in her hand.
"What!? That counted as sexual harassment? I was only offering my opinion?"
"It depends on the situation. Seeing as you made Ren-san so embarrassed, there is nothing you can say against allegations of sexual harassment."
"Well... I guess I'd better keep quiet about your swimsuit, right, Mitsuki?"
I checked out my sister's swimsuit and spoke. Although it was a one-piece, the back was exposed quite boldly. It looked quite sexy from behind.
"……No, I will not feel embarrassment from what you say, Nii-san, so please feel free to say whatever pleases you."
Mitsuki gave an unnatural pause before answering indifferently.
"Really? Then here goes—It looks great on you. Also, the back is a bit sexy."
"……"
Mitsuki glared sharply then pulled my ear without saying a word.
"Hey... Ow! That hurts!"
"...Nii-san, even when you are talking to your sister, you should pay a little attention to your choice of words, shouldn't you?"
"But you said I could say whatever pleases me!?"
I grumbled at her but Mitsuki retorted with her face red.
"That was built upon the assumption of minimum manners!"
Just as we were arguing like this, I suddenly heard Tia scream.
"Ahhh! No, don't fall down!"
I looked in Tia and Iris' direction in surprise, only to see an irregular mound of sand collapse together with the stick.
"Hmph, I won!"

Iris made a victory sign with her hand while Tia slumped her shoulders in dejection. But she immediately looked up and begged to challenge Iris again.
"One more time! Another game!"
"Sure, I'll accept no matter how many times you challenge me. But since everyone has arrived, let's play a different game this time."
Saying that, Iris gestured towards Lisa and the rest with her eyes to Tia.
"Oh..."
It seemed like Tia only noticed now that everyone had gathered.
Patting off the sand stuck to her knees, Tia stood up. Then nervously, she peered at Lisa's face.
"What's the matter? Did something stick to my face?"
Lisa asked her in puzzlement. She did not seem angry at Tia at all.
Seeing her like that, Tia forcefully bowed her head with tears in the corners of her eyes.
"S-Sorry! Tia heard from Yuu, that Tia... did something awful to Lisa... S-So... Sorry!!"
"Oh, you are bothered by what happened earlier."
Lisa seemed to understand the situation. Nodding, she walked over to Tia.
"...Lisa?"
Tia showed a timid expression while looking up at Lisa's face.
"I understand now, then I shall punish you."
Saying that, Lisa raised her hand slowly then gave Tia's head a knock.
"Ow!"
Tia immediately held her head and squatted down.
"H-Hey Lisa, there's no need to go so far—Are you actually angry with her?"
I frantically asked her but Lisa shook her head in denial.
"No, I am not angry at all. However... Punishment is necessary for those seeking atonement. Before she gets consumed by guilt, her wrongdoing must be settled first."
For some reason, Lisa glanced at Mitsuki momentarily before answering in a calm voice.
"Owie..."
Tia was rubbing her head where Lisa's fist had struck her. Tearfully, she looked at Lisa.
"That goes without saying. Punishments are meant to hurt in the first place. But with this, Tia-san, you have atoned for your mistakes. You don't need to feel guilty anymore for what happened. Whether myself or everyone else, we are all fine with it. Am I right?"
Lisa sought agreement from the group. Everyone nodded in response.
"...So that is how things stand."
Lisa smiled gently and hugged Tia to her chest.
"Mmgg..."
"I believe I did control my strength. Does it still hurt? Perhaps I used too much force."

Stroking Tia's head, Lisa remarked with worry.
"...No, it doesn't hurt anymore, Lisa... Thank you."
Burying her face in the bountiful bosom, Tia thanked Lisa quietly.
"Since we've made up, let's all play beach volleyball together!"

Seeing things reach a conclusion, Iris suggested energetically.
"We weren't fighting to begin with... Fine, whatever."
Lisa nodded despite sighing then released Tia from her embrace.
"...Feels like mama."
Tia murmured in a slight daze.
"Then let us gather in a circle and toss the ball. Oh, just that whenever Nii-san's name is called, he must receive the ball no matter where it goes, or else be subjected to punishment."
Holding the beach ball, Mitsuki added a super harsh rule.
"H-Hey, what am I the only one with that restriction!?"
"Because you went through harsh training at NIFL, Nii-san. Without such a handicap, there will not be any tension for you, right?"
Probably still holding a grudge about the swimsuit comment, Mitsuki replied with animosity.
"It's not like I need tension... Fine, I get it, let's go with that rule."
Frankly speaking, I intentionally took on her taunting and accepted the rule because I was confident.
But I soon realized that I was too naive.

"Ah... The first star is out."
Buried in the sand, I was looking up at the red sky. The sun was approaching the horizon in the west. The blue of night was starting to spread from the eastern sky.
My body felt extremely heavy.
Due to everyone enjoying themselves at my expense during the game of volleyball, I had to rush all over the place, reaching my limit no matter how good my stamina. Plus the fact that Lisa and Firill's chests were bouncing even more intensely than the ball, it was hard for me to focus. In the end, I missed a ball and was punished by burial in the sand. Unable to move, I was listening to everyone's voices in the distance.
"Good, good, well done. You are swimming quite well now."
"Really? Tia learned how to swim now?"
Lisa and Tia's conversation reached me. The two of them seemed to be getting along really well.
"Eh!? My swimsuit... Where's my swimsuit!?"
I heard Iris' frantic voice. She had apparently lost her swimsuit again, but since I could not get up, I was unable to see what she looked like.
"...Iris-san, please pull yourself together. Is this it?"
I heard Mitsuki's voice of resignation. Apparently, she had found Iris' swimsuit.
The sound of flickering pages could be heard nearby.
Because Firill was reading a book under the sun umbrella.
"—Your turn, Ren."
"Mm."

Ariella and Ren were playing stick-in-the-sand using the sand on top of me. I was quite grateful that the sand over me was gradually decreasing, but it felt quite ticklish to be touched indirectly like that.
Peaceful times passed in this way until the sky filled up with stars. At this moment, I noticed three sets of footsteps approaching. Due to habits formed during my time at NIFL, I could discern the physique of people from the sound of their footfall.
—Two adults and a child... apparently carrying something heavy.
Hence, I turned my head and waited for the new arrivals to enter my view. The three of them were all known to me. One was Shinomiya-sensei while unbelievably, the other two were... The principal, Charlotte B. Lord, and her secretary, Mica Stuart-san.
Apparently, the footsteps I mistook for a child's belonged to the principal. Dressed in a white sundress, the principal's age could not be determined from appearance. No one would raise any doubts even she were to be described as a student in Midgard.
"I can't believe you guys are having so much fun. Let me join in too."
Coming over to my side, the principal looked down at me who was buried in the sand. I suspected that Mitsuki had informed Shinomiya-sensei before coming here and the news must have reached the principal and Mica-san.
"...You want to buried too, principal?"
"Of course not! I want to frolic with pure maidens in their swimsuits too!"
"I can feel a generation gap when you phrase it like that."
I gave my honest opinion but the principal removed her sandal, stepped on me and twisted my head with her toes.
"Shut up or I'll step on you."
"You're already stepping on me!"
I turned my face and yelled in order to avoid the principal's bare foot.
Nearby, Ren and Ariella watched our behavior with blank expressions.
The principal's sudden appearance probably troubled them.
"Hmph, I won't ask you guys to join me without a reason. I come with gifts. Mica and Haruka, begin the preparations."
"Yes, affirmative."
Still dressed as a maid, Mica-san swiftly began to put together the objects she was carrying in her arms.
"...I am not your servant."
Shinomiya-sensei sighed and placed down on the plastic mat the bag she had brought. From the bag, she took out meat and vegetables.
"Principal... What the heck are you doing?"
Hearing the question, the principal smiled proudly.
"Don't you get it just by seeing? Speaking of beach activities at night, of course there's barbecue!"
"Barbecue!? That's awesome!!"

Iris cheered from the distance. Since the sun had already set, I was thinking it was almost time for us to go our separate ways, but it looked like the party was just about to begin.

Finally liberated from imprisonment under the sand, I joined everyone around the barbecue grill.
"Fufufu..."
Eating only meat, the principal lustfully oogled the girls in swimsuits.
"I don't suppose your only goal here is to see everyone in their swimsuit, right?"
I asked in exasperation.
"Of course it is. Got a problem with that?"
"...Well, I think there are many problems with that."
Seeing the principal nod and admit openly, I could not help but sigh.
"Hmph, it's true that admiring swimsuits is my biggest goal... But checking out her condition is also part of the reason."
The principal shifted her gaze towards Tia across the grill and whispered.
"Tia, she's... probably fine. I think she will surely choose to be human."
Likewise, I whispered in reply.
"Hold on, Tia-san, you must eat your vegetables."
"Oh no, don't put the green pepper there!"
Seeing Lisa place a green pepper on her plate, Tia lost composure. Judging from the way they got along together, I felt that there would be no problem anymore.
"Choose...? Yes, even if she is a true dragon, if she lives as a human, she could become human. I too believe that how she lives her life... is far more important than what she is."
Narrowing her eyes, the principal spoke as though saying a prayer.
"...Principal?"
"Fufu, I accidentally said something that doesn't fit my image. Putting that aside, how's your wound from earlier?"
"Wound? Oh, the one on my left hand... The wound already healed, but the scar did not go away..."
The memory of her licking my wound flashed in my mind, making me answer a little nervously.
The mark left behind by that red swelling on the back of my left hand felt like an additional line had been added to my dragon mark.
"I see... It really did turn out like this."
The principal nodded with a look of comprehension. Speaking of which, back when she saw the wound, she apparently said the scar would never go away.
"Just by looking at the wound, you could tell it would leave a scar?"
"Only if examined carefully."

Saying that, the principal licked the grease sticking around her mouth. That motion seemed extraordinarily seductive, forcing me to gulp.
"—Charlotte-sama, please do not joke with students at their expense."
At this moment, Mica-san appeared and used her chopsticks to stuff a piece of green pepper into the principal's mouth.
"M-Mmmph! S-Stop it right now! Mica! I-I hate green peppers!"
"Please do not be picky with food in front of students. How would a picky principal serve as a role model for students?"
As though suffering karmic retribution for eating only meat the whole time, the principal was forced to eat vegetables.
Seeing her like that, everyone laughed out loud.
"Ahahahaha!"
Tia also laughed very happily.
Hearing her laughter, I felt my gaze drawn to the breakwater's direction.
Actually, I had emailed Honoka to invite her when I heard we were starting a barbecue.
She would probably feel intimidated to suddenly join an event where everyone else was part of Brynhildr Class. But taking advantage of the principal's presence, it should make things easier.
—If she came, I wanted to introduce her to everyone.
But it did not look like Honoka was coming.
She was probably busy due to the accident during the practical. Or after injuring her classmate, she felt an aversion against lively events.
—I wouldn't want to make her feel troubled. I'll just email her again later.
Deciding that in my mind, I turned my attention to the laughing crowd again —

Part 6

After the barbecue, the teachers gathered up the equipment and left. The members of Brynhildr Class all shifted locations to Mitsuki's dorm.
Lisa and the others had apparently gotten permission from Shinomiya-sensei to stay over at Mitsuki's dorm.
The girls were apparently planning to have pajamas party in Mitsuki's room, but I could not possibly join in as a guy after all, so after showering, I changed into a t-shirt and lay down alone in my own bed.
Tia was not in the room either. She had gone to Mitsuki's room with the others. Probably after everything that had happened today, she had started trusting her classmates from Brynhildr Class.
...Or rather, I should say it was thanks to Lisa.
When about to separate from me, Tia looked uneasy but she followed obediently after Lisa held her hand. They looked like mother and daughter, bringing a smile to my face.
As soon as I lay down, my eyelids instantly felt heavy.
Although I wanted to fall asleep just like that, I wanted to email Honoka before that. Hence, I picked up my portable terminal. But when I checked the screen, there were two emails that had arrived at some point. One was Honoka's reply while the other was sent by Major Loki. Speaking of which, Major Loki had mentioned he was going to send me data on Kili.
I opened Honoka's email first.
'I am so sorry I can't join you even though you went out of your way to invite me. Because I suddenly received a call from my mother, I missed the chance to meet up with you. My mother says she is worried whether I can live properly on my own. Looks like I am not that trusted.'
I read her email and keyed in my response.
'Don't worry about it since it was a sudden invitation without warning. Your own business is more important. Making calls to Midgard from outside requires going through convoluted procedures, but your mother still called you. She must be a good mother.'
Honoka had previously described their relationship as cold but in fact, she was probably close with her mother. I felt a bit relieved while sending my email. Then a reply came back quickly.
'Thank you for understanding but my mother still says things on her own without allowing any argument. Oh, speaking of which, I told her about you,

Yuu-san, and she is very interested in you. She might be visiting Midgard in the near future, so please do your best then.'
Visiting Midgard...?
This was not a place that even a D's family could enter so easily. Honoka's mother was apparently active all over the world... Perhaps she was actually a person of quite substantial position.
Hence, I replied 'If possible, please have her show some mercy? Anyway, goodnight.'
—Okay, let me read Major Loki's email next.
I tensed up and opened the email. There were no contents apart from an attachment file.
I decompressed the data and opened it. What appeared was a profile with a photo included.
—So this is Kili?
It was most likely taken on a battlefield. The photo showed a girl standing in the middle of blazing flames.
She had slightly tanned skin and long black hair. Although her facial features were quite exquisite, her gaze was very sharp. Wearing a smoking black cape, her entire body gave off vibes of danger.
When told about Kili in the past, there was never such a vivid photo. Since NIFL had apparently fought Kili while taking Tia into custody, perhaps this was taken during that time.
—Kili Surtr Muspelheim. Female. Roughly 160cm in height. Age unknown. Weight unknown... Nationality and family background unknown too... Since three years ago, she started being active as the leader of the dragon cult, the Sons of Muspell. There are over three hundred terrorist incidents regarded as related to her. Reports indicate that she can incinerate people and objects without touching them. Very likely a D specializing in the transmutation of flames. Already deemed a disaster without concrete evidence...
Despite the full efforts of NIFL's intelligence agency, the amount of corroborated data was exceedingly small. Although there was an abundance of information noted with indeterminate veracity, it was all data that was hard to believe directly.
—By conservative estimates, suspected murder count is a hundred thousand people. Within a single night, wiping out a town stationed with a regiment of a thousand troops. A sniper located a kilometer away was burned to death by her before he could pull the trigger. Wide area bombing was used, expecting her death to be assured, but she was later confirmed to be still alive. Often appearing in towns after "Blue" Hekatonkheir had passed through...
"Is she even human...?"
I could not help but blurt out.
Even if Kili was a D, I doubted she could do all these things.
It would be more probable if she was the eighth dragon instead.

"But... Oh right, she is living as a dragon right now."
Kili was the culprit who had indoctrinated Tia with the concept that Ds were dragons. Suppose Kili also believed she was a dragon, then perhaps she had become something even more of a dragon than a dragon. If this was the appearance of a D who had chosen to be a dragon—
"I absolutely won't let Tia become like her."
With firm resolve, I muttered. Then lying on the bed again, I looked up at the ceiling From Mitsuki's room above, I could hear faint sounds from their voices and footsteps.
—Whether from Basilisk or Kili, I will protect Tia.
Vowing in my heart, I then closed my eyes.
Drowsiness attacked again. My thought gradually grew hazy and my consciousness left me.
Then—
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!
A massive low rumbling made me open my eyes. The room kept shaking, the desk lamp fell from the desk, causing an acute crash.
"What...!?"
I sat up to a start but the shaking soon stopped. The alarm clock next to my pillow read 2am. I had fallen asleep without realizing it.
—This was no earthquake. There was a loud noise... The shaking was caused by some kind of impact just now.
I immediately concluded that because I had experienced identical sounds and shaking before.
But this could not possibly be the same situation. That thing could not possibly be here.
"..."
Nevertheless, my palms were wet with sweat. Saliva was building up in my mouth. With a gulp, I swallowed it.
I jumped out of bed and ran to the window, pulling the curtains open forcefully.
On the other side of the jungle behind the dorm, under the starry night sky, part of the jungle had been cut down unnaturally.
The night sky's dark blue was blotted by a certain gigantic shadow.
Faintly blue in phosphorescence, the shadow shook its humongous body.
As for what thing I was witnessing—I knew very well.
"The blue dragon—'Blue' Hekatonkheir..."
Blankly, I could only recite in a hoarse voice the name of the being that was towering over the night sky. Right there was the monster that had tried to trample the town where Mitsuki and I lived.
Hekatonkheir's entire body was covered with blue scales. Whenever its body moved, geometric patterns could be seen blinking and flashing.
Without any facial features, the head only had a huge horn, upright as though rushing towards the sky.
Wooooooooooooooooooooo!

Finally, the siren at the clock tower sounded.
This meant that Midgard did not become aware of this situation until now.
"What the heck... Why didn't anyone notice?"
Midgard was defended by the concentric layered defense system, Midgardsormr. How on earth did Hekatonkheir infiltrate Midgard without being discovered? No matter what, I could not think of the reason.
But appearing before us was neither Basilisk nor Kili but an unexpected crisis. This was absolutely certain.
Accompanied by the siren, the clock tower was gradually retracted into the ground.
However, Hekatonkheir bent down slowly and reached out with its long right arm.
The gigantic hand reached above the school campus and swept sideways.
CRASH—!!
The violent sound of breakage was heard.
Originally in the process of descent, the clock tower had its upper half chopped off. The remaining lower half also collapsed.
The siren stopped. Deformed by the impact, the clock tower's lower portion also stopped moving.
"Ah—"
I listened to the cry from my own throat as though I was completely detached.
The clock tower was where Midgard's important facilities and the emergency command center were gathered, and even the principal's office was on the top floor of the upper half that was sent flying just now...
The faces of the principal and Mica-san, who had just parted ways with me earlier, flashed in my mind.
"Grrr..."
Gritting my teeth, I rushed out of the room—

Chapter 4 - Red-Winged Tiamat

Part 1

"Mitsuki!"
I rushed into Mitsuki's room on the second floor of the dorm. Everyone had already changed into their uniforms and were gathered next to the window.
"Shh!"
Iris brought her finger to her lip and shushed me. Upon closer examination, I saw Mitsuki urgently calling somewhere on her portable terminal.
"—Please respond ASAP! Command center! Shinomiya-sensei! Please respond!"
Despite Mitsuki's desperate cries, no one answered. Mitsuki finally gave up, disconnected the call and turned around to face us.
"Everyone—Just as you can see, this is an emergency. Central command is demolished and we cannot expect backup support. Hence, our countermeasures shall be centered around ourselves, is that alright?"
"Of course! Mitsuki-san, issue orders now."
Lisa replied to Mitsuki while the others nodded with tense expressions to concur.
As official members of the Counter-Dragon Squad, they were all wearing tiny communicators on their heads.
"Well then, Ariella-san, please head to the girls dormitories and take charge of directing the scene. After confirming whether there is someone whose dragon mark has changed color, gather the Counter-Dragon Squad. As for ordinary students, have them head to the underground shelter. If anyone is discovered with a dragon mark that has changed color, please send her to the shelter to be isolated then call me."
"Got it, I'm heading off immediately."
Ariella manifested her fictional armament then enveloping herself in wind, she flew off in the night sky.
"Firill-san and Ren-san, stay on standby in the air above Hekatonkheir to await my instructions to attack."
"…Understood."
"Mm."
Firill and Ren manifested their fictional armaments and flew out of the window.
"Nii-san and Iris-san, please come with me. We will approach Hekatonkheir via the ground."
"Understood."

"Yes, got it!"
Iris and I nodded but the unmentioned Tia and Lisa spoke up.
"Yuu… Are you leaving?"
"Hold on, Mitsuki-san! Did you forget me?"
Tia gazed at me with an uneasy expression while Lisa questioned Mitsuki.
"Lisa-san, you are responsible for guarding Tia-san. Attacking Hekatonkheir requires Nii-san's power no matter what, but we cannot send Tia-san to the frontline. Consequently, I hope you can stay by her side, Lisa-san, having gained Tia-san's trust."
"B-But…"
"Although it should be Basilisk that has its eyes set on Tia-san, we cannot completely rule out the possibility of Hekatonkheir targeting Tia-san too. As a precaution, we need someone who can be adaptable in emergencies. I am counting on you, Lisa-san."
Mitsuki bowed her head to request the hesitating Lisa. Seeing her like that, Lisa sighed.
"…Fine, I understand. I accept the mission. Tia-san, we will watch over the house together."
Lisa bent down in front of Tia and said to her gently.
"B-But Yuu…"
"Don't worry about him. No matter how you look, he doesn't seem like someone who will die that easily. Trusting a man and seeing him off is part of a woman's fortitude, you know?"
"A woman's fortitude?"
Not quite understanding what the words meant, Tia titled her head in puzzlement.
"Perhaps you can call it the qualities of a virtuous wife. You have no cause for worry, because you will not be alone."
Lisa held her hand and Tia's face relaxed slightly. She was probably scared of being left alone like the time she lost her parents. That was why she refused to leave me so adamantly in the beginning. But now, apart from me, there was someone else who could accompany her.
"Lisa will stay with Tia… together?"
"Yes, we will stay together."
Seeing Lisa nod in agreement, Tia turned her gaze to me.
"……Got it, Tia is a virtuous wife, so Tia will wait for husband to come home. Yuu… You must return no matter what, okay?"
Tia spoke to me with serious eyes.
"Yeah, I'll definitely return."
I rubbed Tia's head and agreed to her demand.
"—Then let us depart, Nii-san and Iris-san."
Mitsuki hurried us.
Thus, to handle a dragon's surprise attack, an internal defense battle took place on the island, the first crisis of this sort since Midgard's inception.

Part 2

We ran along the road leading from the dorm to the school campus.
Mitsuki's dorm was located on the southwest side of the island while Hekatonkheir was on the east. Even though Hekatonkheir was still quite far away, it was impossible to capture a complete view of its figure. After all, its size was too extraordinary, allowing it to reach the school campus in the middle of the island just by bending over and extending its hand.
"It hasn't moved after breaking the clock tower. What's with it?"
Iris ran while voicing her doubts.
Indeed, after doing that, Hekatonkheir had stood in the same spot without moving.
Neither walking nor destroying.
"Pondering a dragon's actions is futile, because we do not even understand why they are moving about all over the world. Hence, there is no way for us to understand its reason for not moving."
Mitsuki answered bitterly.
She was probably recalling about three years ago. Back then, we were wondering: why here? Why was Hekatonkheir advancing towards our town...?
"But since it stopped, that's a good thing for us. We'll find a way to take care of it now. You brought me because you intend to drive it away like three years ago, right?"
"Yes, that anti-dragon weapon you used in the past, Nii-san... Please lend me that power."
Mitsuki nodded to confirm my question.
Three years ago, I obtained power at a great price, destroying Hekatonkheir temporarily. Although it could not kill the dragon completely, as long as we used the same method, surviving this crisis should be quite probable.
"It's just that... Midgard will suffer severe damage if we shoot from here, you know? A bit of carelessness and we might end up flattening half the island."
"I know, which is why I intend to push Hekatonkheir into the sea first."
Mitsuki's plan was very appropriate but there was a problem.
"Is it even possible... to push that thing?"
I muttered while I looked at Hekatonkheir's figure, covering the eastern sky.

The mass difference was too great. Besides, the fact that such a gigantic body could walk on two legs was in itself quite abnormal. According to the data I saw at NIFL, Hekatonkheir was quite light in weight relative to its physique... But even so, humans still could not compare to it. Furthermore, Hekatonkheir's characteristic was the power of immortality. No matter what damage was done to it, that thing would immediately recover.
In fact, three years ago, Mitsuki still failed to stop Hekatonkheir no matter how hard she tried.
"Worry not, because unlike three years ago, we have reliable comrades now."
Mitsuki replied confidently then looked at Iris.
"Eh? M-Me?"
"Yes, right now, Firill-san and Ren-san are on standby in the air. Ariella-san will also bring the Counter-Dragon Squad over soon. Since we have so many people, we will surely succeed."
Mitsuki declared firmly and Iris nodded with a blush.
"Y-Yes... That's right, I will do my best!"
Mitsuki was running ahead of us. When she reached the fork in the road leading to the girls dormitories, she stopped.
This location happened to be the spot where Hekatonkheir could be viewed across the school campus.
"If we attack from this direction, we should be able to push Hekatonkheir towards the eastern shore. Iris-san, are you ready?"
"Yes—Caduceus!"
Iris manifested her fictional armament and stared at the giant on the other side.
"Nii-san, please remain on standby until you are ready. Firill-san, Ren-san, can you hear me?"
Mituski pressed the switch on the small communicator on her head, calling to the pair that was supposed to be in the air.
'...I hear you.'
'Mm.'
"You two coordinate with us and simultaneously attack Hekatonkheir from the west. Counting down! Nine!"
Mitsuki started to count down while manifesting in her left hand the fictional armament of a bow—Brionac. Then she nocked an arrow of dark matter with her right hand.
"Eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—!"
At zero, the girls all attacked at the same time.
"Second Arrow—Night Blaze!"
"O holy silver, explode!"
'...Flare Burst Quintet.'
'Mm!'

Stacked together, the four girls' attacks caused a giant explosion in front of Hekatonkheir. A mixture of red and white light blew way the canopy of night briefly, illuminating the surroundings as brightly as day.
Several seconds later, the blast pressure reached us. To avoid getting blown away by the hot wind, I stood my ground firmly while narrowing my eyes, confirming the outcome of the attack.
After the bright light subsided, what appeared was Hekatonkheir with large holes gouged out of various parts of its body. The entire right arm was gone from the shoulder down. Compared to Leviathan from the previous battle, Hekatonkheir was incomparably fragile, however—
"Eh…?"
Iris exclaimed in surprise. It was only natural for her to be taken aback if it was her first time seeing it.
As though rewinding time, Hekatonkheir's wounds healed up within the blink of an eye. Rather than regenerate, it would be better to call it restored. That was how outrageous a power it was.
Recovering its original appearance in merely a few seconds, Hekatonkheir seemed as though nothing had happened, towering under the starry sky, it had not been pushed back by a single step.
"…Its body is more fragile than imagined. All impacts were absorbed. Next time, suppress your firepower to a lower level."
Mitsuki called to everyone with a solemn look but Iris made a troubled expression.
"Mitsuki-chan, since attacks will work, why not attack even harder to destroy it in one fell swoop?"
"Be that as it may, the result is the same. NIFL used thermobaric and nuclear attacks in the past and succeeded in destroying its entire body all at once… But before long, Hekatonkheir revived again. The only exception was that time three years ago… Only Nii-san's trump card has the potential."
Mitsuki spoke calmly and drew her bow again.
Thus, the attacks resumed. As for me, I waited behind Mitsuki and Iris, waiting for the time for me to enter the stage.
However, attacks that were too strong would repeat the same mistake as earlier, while attacks that were too weak would be unable to move Hekatonkheir's gigantic body.
The only saving grace was that Hekatonkheir did not move at all.
It made no signs to strike back no matter how many attacks it suffered.
Perhaps because it was immortal, it did not need to react to danger… Still, I felt that something was not right.
The fact that Hekatonkheir had attacked the clock tower without hesitation, paralyzing Midgard's functionality in a precise and effective manner… It was almost as though it knew that the clock tower was the central core.
Although Mitsuki believed that pondering a dragon's actions was futile, supposing Hekatonkheir was thinking… Then there might be meaning

behind why it was not moving. Either its goal had already been achieved or there was no reason to take action.
I felt inexplicably unsettled in my chest, unable to calm down. It felt like I had somehow missed something.
And from just now, I was having this sense of deja vu.
An easily penetrated body, instantaneous recovery... That scene was overlapping with previous images. But rather than from three years ago, it was a recent memory—
"Now everyone, transmute maximum volume of air! We will use wind to push Hekatonkheir to that side!"
Under Mitsuki's command, everyone created raging winds.
Hekatonkheir's upper body shook slightly. The wind's wake caused the surrounding trees to rustle. Carrying leaves, the raging winds blew all over the place.
However, the wind produced by the four girls did not seem powerful enough. Hekatonkheir remained standing where it was.
"Hmm... Looks like reinforcements might be necessary."
Mituski murmured in chagrin. But the wind just now made me figure out why the situation felt so familiar.
What surfaced in my mind was the red dragon, glaring at us from above, surrounded by a swirling storm—
"Right, this is very similar to that time..."
"Huh?"
Reacting to what I blurted out, Iris looked at me.
"This is very similar to Tia when she went out of control and became a dragon. A body composed from a fictional armament will immediately restore its form even after getting cut up. That scene overlaps inexplicably well with how Hekatonkheir restores itself."
Hearing me say that, a troubled expression surfaced on Iris' face.
"Mononobe, are you saying... that Hekatonkheir is someone's fictional armament?"
"Well..."
Now that she pointed it out, I realized how absurd my suggestion was.
Then Mitsuki interrupted.
"Impossible. Creating such a gigantic fictional armament is impossible. Even Ren-san, believed to have the greatest dark matter generating capacity to date, she cannot achieve the amount necessary to form Hekatonkheir at all."
"...You're right. I knew my idea was too absurd."
However, many things would make sense if one thought of Hekatonkheir as a fictional armament.
Appearing in Midgard without anyone noticing. Attacking as though it knew that the clock tower was Midgard's central core.
No matter which one, if one were to assume that Hekatonkheir was fictional armament created by someone, then it would all be explained. Just by

transmuting its surface and limbs, it would be able to walk on the ground and destroy buildings with its arms. If the majority of its body was weightless dark matter, then it made sense how such a gigantic body could walk on two legs.
No—Hold on, following that assumption, it meant that the culprit was a human... a D?
At this time, I could only think of one person, and that person's aim was to—
"!?"
Realizing the enemy's goal in alarm, I looked back in the dorm's direction.
The explosion occurred within my view after that.

Part 3

I dashed as fast as I could, my feet striking the ground with full force.
Even forgetting to breathe, I raced along the road back to the dormitory.
Black smoke, billowing into the starry sky, entered my view. I drove my legs to move furiously.
After I started sprinting, I immediately heard Mitsuki call out to stop me, but I had no time to attend to her.
By merely the difference of a second, it could mean the boundary of life and death for someone.
Honed on the battlefield, my instincts told me that was what the current situation was like.
I also understood clearly the risks involved in deserting my post, being the trump card for taking care of Hekatonkheir. Also, there was no concrete proof that the giant was a fictional armament.
But I followed my own instincts. What I should be fighting now was not Hekatonkheir. Tia and Lisa could very well be the ones facing the greatest crisis.
I could now see Mitsuki's dorm ahead. The smoke seemed to be rising from the back of the building.
Hence, I circled around to the back of the dorm. In the instant just as I turned the corner, I felt a blast of hot wind.
"Kuh..."
Sensing danger, I halted and swiftly checked out my surroundings.
The thick black smoke was rising out from Mitsuki's room. An explosion had apparently occurred. Even the surrounding walls were scorched black.
The spacious lawn in the backyard had tongues of flame flickering all over the place. Part of the grass had been burnt away completely, exposing the soil beneath.
Over there were three girls.
One was Lisa with Gungnir in hand. Her clothing was burnt and blackened while there was even bleeding on her forehead. To protect Tia behind her, Lisa seemed to have deployed a shield of air, with strong wind swirling in the surroundings.
Tia was hugging her own trembling body, staring at the girl facing off against Lisa.
Even confronted with the tip of Gungnir, the girl was still smiling.

Tied up, her long black hair was swaying in the hot wind. The lenses of her glasses reflected blazing flames.
I recognized her.
Tachikawa Honoka.
She was the girl who had transferred into Midgard together with Tia. I had talked to her a number of times and became familiar with her. Not long ago, we had just corresponded through email.
Why was Honoka here?
The question occupied my mind but as a soldier, I was already calmly analyzing the situation and reached the conclusion.
—No need to think of a reason. She is the enemy.

Enemy... Honoka? No, wait a sec, it was too early to decide that. Because she already counted as a friend to me and was also someone I originally wanted to help as much as I could...
Honoka glanced at me, a smile appearing on the corners of her lips.
"Fufu, because it took some time, he ended up coming. I can't be bothered to hold back anymore."
Her tone of voice made her sound like a different person. I saw Honoka clap her hands at Lisa.
Instantly, a foreboding feeling rushed along my spine.
—Act quickly! Otherwise, Lisa will be killed!
My instincts shouted, dispelling my hesitation.
Anti-personnel weapon—AT Nergal!
I used transmutation to create an anti-personnel projectile-based electroshock gun then pulled the trigger at Honoka.
A small explosion occurred in front of Honoka with a bang. Only shortly did I realize that the fired bullet had vaporized. At the same time, Nergal felt scorching hot in my right hand.
"Gah...!?"
I frantically released Nergal and jumped backwards.
Nergal became deformed as though it was candy. Heated red-hot, the gunpowder inside exploded.
—What? What did she do?
Aware of slight burns on my right hand, I gazed at Honoka at the same time.
"I can't believe you fired a gun so suddenly. How mean. But that was the correct decision. Had your reaction been slightly slower, her pretty face would have been wrecked."
Honoka chuckled as though she found it amusing. Hearing her say that, Lisa yelled angrily:
"Don't you get too arrogant. Likewise, I have not gone all out yet. But I have resolved myself now—Pierce, flare!!"
Lisa shot a wide laser beam from the tip of her spear towards Honoka. This attack, capable of penetrating a giant block of diamond in an instant, was not a move to use against a human. A direct hit would mean melting, even to the point of becoming unrecognizable.
However, that powerful attack did not touch Honoka. The laser's trajectory was mysteriously bent in the middle, flying off somewhere else.
I felt the surrounding air temperature rise even further. The rising hot air was making the image of Honoka's figure waver. Perhaps she was using this heat to create a lens of air, bending the laser.
"What..."
Lisa exclaimed in surprise while Honoka stared at her coldly.
"You... are truly a nuisance."
Boom, without any warning, an explosion suddenly happened next to Lisa.
"Kyah!?"

Lisa was blown away by the blast, smashing into the dorm's wall. Thanks to her shield of wind, she could avoid a direct impact, but with her back leaning against the wall, she slowly collapsed. The fictional armament in her hand also vanished.
"Lisa!"
Tia screamed and ran towards Lisa. Although I wanted to rush over immediately to help, I could not move.
Honoka was looking at me. My instincts told me that the instant my focus was distracted, it would become a lethal mistake.
"Now we can finally talk in peace... Yuu-san."
Honoka called my name sarcastically.
Parched from the hot air, I wetted the interior of my mouth with saliva and asked in a stiff tone of voice:
"Honoka... Why are you doing this? Is Tia your target?"
"Yes, indeed. I will be taking Tia to Basilisk."
Hearing her reply, I gritted my teeth.
"...In other words, Honoka, you are a member of the Sons of Muspell?"
"Oh~ It seems that you expected us to make a move, judging from your wording. In that case, I don't need to introduce myself again, right?"
Honoka asked in a testing manner. Hearing that, I figured out who she was. Since Honoka was a D and belonged to the Sons of Muspell, there was only one person meeting all the criteria.
"Are you... Kili Surtr Muspelheim?"
Although her appearance was completely different from the girl in the photo sent by Major Loki, I could not think of anyone else matching the criteria.
"Bingo. But that was just a randomly chosen name, so it's perfectly fine for you to call me Honoka too, okay?"
"Forgive me for declining. I won't call you with a friend's name."
"Really...? What a shame. I really like this name of Honoka."
Honoka—No, Kili smiled with a bit of apparent sadness. She threw away the glasses she was wearing.
Fallen on the ground, the glasses gradually twisted in shape and melted. Those lenses were probably purely cosmetic. Even after taking the glasses off, she still looked completely different from the Kili in the photo.
"Who could have expected you to infiltrate us as a transfer student, how on earth did you do it? NIFL should have acquired your biometric data... Even if you disguised yourself, your identity would have been exposed in an examination, right?"
Hearing me say that, Kili scoffed as though finding it ludicrous:
"Ha, something like an examination can be easily handled. Whether blood or DNA, just use dark matter to create counterfeits."
"What... How could such complicated transmutations be possible—"
"It is possible. Just as Tia's horns are also my present to her."
Kili explained simply and easily, which meant that—
"...Tia did not make herself look like that?"

I felt emotions of anger rush out from the depths of my heart.
"Of course, how could Tia possibly have accomplished it? Besides, given the specs of the human brain, it is impossible to fully handle the massive amount of information required for biogenic transmutation."
"Haha... You almost sound like you're saying you're not human."
I ridiculed her sarcastically but Kili nodded her head seriously.
"Indeed, because I am a dragon. This human appearance is just a disguise. Just by using biogenic transmutation, I can change my appearance and face any time I want. To find Tia who had been taken away by NIFL, I believed the simplest and fastest way was to turn myself into someone else and get sent to Midgard."
"...A dragon huh?"
I gritted my teeth. Because of that sentence, I understood that she was the culprit who had twisted Tia's mindset.
Kili had probably been active while changing her appearance constantly. No wonder NIFL was unable to get a grasp on her information. Whether the appearance captured in that photo in her profile or her face as Tachikawa Honoka, all were surely fake disguises.
"Jeez, could you not make such a scary face? I've no intention of fighting you. Had I wanted to kill you, I would've done so long ago. I just want to take Tia away."
Saying that, Kili turned her gaze to Tia. However, Tia did not notice and kept trying to call Lisa.
"However... I never expected her to change so much in merely two days. Until recently, she was still my very obedient student."
"So you're the one who taught Tia..."
I muttered bitterly. While tutoring Tia with her homework, I had concluded that Tia probably had a good teacher. But I was totally mistaken. What she had given to Tia was the most awful education to make her into a dragon.
"Yes, that's right. I found Tia in Midgard as expected. Since that child did not recognize her disguised teacher, I greedily thought I'd investigate the internal secrets of Midgard... But I was wrong. I shouldn't have spent extra time on that."
I recalled how Honoka was staring at the school map on the first day of transferring in. That was Kili trying to memorize information about the enemy camp.
Speaking of which, Tia had said something about not wanting to go near her. Even without knowing her true identity, Tia perhaps instinctively feared her.
"Also, I almost killed a classmate. So many setbacks."
Kili turned her gaze back to me, shrugged and spoke.
"Almost killed, you say... Don't tell me that the transmutation accident you mentioned at the infirmary was..."

"Yes, someone bad-mouthed Tia and I accidentally lost my temper. Tia's value far surpasses that of ordinary Ds. She is excellent talent who might become Basilisk's mate... That girl really did not know her place."
Kili spoke with a cold expresion.
"—In other words, your regrets back then were all lies. Someone like you... I'll never hand Tia over to you. I'm not going to let Tia become a real dragon!"
"Fufu, you're really stubborn about Tia, aren't you? The blonde girl was also desperately trying to protect her... It feels like she has too many burdens. Why don't I lighten things for her?"
Saying that, Kili's dark gaze turned towards Lisa.
"Stop!"
I frantically called out. Kili immediately narrowed her eyes in joy.
"...Just kidding. If I attacked her now, wouldn't Tia next to her get caught in the crossfire? You're so amusing. Talking to you is never a bore."
—Liar. This girl acted according to whim. She really would have done it.
My back was drenched from cold sweat. Currently, I seemed to be feeling fear—fear that Lisa would die.
Three years ago, the price I paid for power was that my emotion of fear had become very diluted. And the crisis before my eyes was enough to summon that minor sense of fear.
The murderous intent I had sensed at the beach last time probably came from Kili. That time, Kili was surely watching us from somewhere.
"Phew..."
To calm my mind, I exhaled deeply. I noticed my breathing had become rather irregular just now.
I never knew that a friend coming to danger... would make me lose composure to such an extent.
Perhaps I had not lost my sense of fear to begin with. It was just that due to a large part of my memories getting eaten away, it shook my confidence in asserting I was Mononobe Yuu, hence I could not feel any value in myself.
Precisely because of that... Now that I had obtained things of value, that was why I felt fear.
"—Kili, make one false move and I'll kill you."
To protect precious people, I quietly declared.
I did not even know my opponent's method of attacking. To perform transmutation, generating dark matter was a necessary step, but Kili was able to cause explosions without any preparatory motion.
No wonder Major Loki said she was stronger than me. The opponent was undoubtedly more powerful than me, but if I intended to kill her, it would be a separate matter—
"Fufu... How scary. But by this point, I can't back down either."
Despite facing my murderous intent head on, Kili still smiled confidently.
"What's the meaning in letting Tia become Basilisk's mate?"

"Rather than meaning, it'd be better to call it using the right person for the right job. That's the only use for Ds."
"I can't believe you said... use?"
She was virtually treating Tia as an object. It made me agitated in tone.
"Because Tia has talent, I originally looked forward to her other potential... But judging from the current situation, that potential is tiny beyond measure. In that case, turning her into another Basilisk would be the best use of resources."
Resources... I realized that Kili merely viewed Tia as material for making a dragon.
Human words were not going to reach Kili.
Although I did not know why she wanted to increase the number of dragons, I believed with certainty that she and I were irreconcilable enemies.
To protect Tia from her evil grasp, if I must do that no matter what—
"Enough, I get it. I will stop you... Even if it means I must kill you."
—Fictional armament, Siegfried.
Holding the ornamental gun formed from dark matter in my hand, I treated Kili as a target for slaughter. I awakened the being slumbering in my subconscious, gradually turning myself into a monster.
Redundant thoughts vanished. My mind became clear. My sharpened senses transmitted information to my brain that I previously did not feel.
A feeling of omnipotence as though everything was in my grasp, it heightened my emotions.
"I really had no intention of fighting you... Very well, try killing me. If you kill me, I'll stop."
Kili grinned and responded like that.
Instantly, I felt the surrounding air temperature rise all at once.
"!?"
Just as I jumped to the right, an explosion happened. Accompanied with flames, the shockwave struck my entire body. I took a defensive posture and hit the ground, rolling on scorched bushes.
Very likely, she had used transmutation to create some kind of flammable material.
The information sent by Major Loki said that Kili used flames to attack. Judging from the current situation, this info was correct.
However, using transmutation would require the generation of dark matter the instant before attacking. Yet I did not see her doing so. It puzzled me greatly.
"To think you just declared so forcefully, yet now you're in such an awkward state."
Sensing her pursuit, I aimed Siegfried at the ground and fired.
"Nitro Bullet!"
I created a large volume of nitrogen to produce a gust of wind. I thought that using noncombustible nitrogen would blow away the elements of fire that Kili might be creating, but—

Whoosh, a violent sense of heat and pain attacked my right shoulder.
Feeling flesh getting seared, I frantically escaped.
Since it was emergency evasion, I had accidentally stepped into the downwind part of burning bushes. Enveloped in rising black smoke, I covered my nostrils and mouth with my left hand. To prevent my fictional weapon from getting consumed through contact with smoke, I used my body as a shield.
—No, what Kili created was not flammable matter.
I understood that my prediction was wrong.
Considering I was getting scorched without an explosion, the attack's main vector was intangible heat itself.
She was most likely transmuting dark matter directly into thermal energy.
Although it was a high-level technique, this type of skill was not beyond common sense in the same way as biogenic transmutation.
That explosion was quite probably the result of the produced heat causing oxygen to react.
Even after solving one mystery—The greatest problem still remained.
Since Kili's dark matter could not be seen, it was impossible to predict where attacks would come from. Unless this mechanism was figured out, even approaching Kili was impossible.
I racked my brain amid smoke, but during that time, Kili did not attack for some reason.
"Aren't you going to kill me? Come, do it now."
Despite taunting me, she did not attack further.
—What's with her?
Inside smoke, due to the interference of particles, dark matter would get consumed at a faster rate. But if a larger amount of dark matter was generated in the beginning, it would be enough to attack. However, I still had yet to see her dark matter even once.
No, wait… If it was purely invisible—
A possibility surfaced in my mind.
—Worth a shot!
While rushing out of the smoke, I used all the remaining dark matter in Siegfried and poured it into the bullet, firing it.
"Smoke Bullet!"
Instantly, the surroundings became shrouded by pure white smoke. My fictional armament disappeared from my hand. Since it could not be sustained inside smoke anyway, vanishing did not matter.
Racing through a world covered in white smoke, I charged straight at Kili.
I did not encounter any intercepting attack arising from the transmutation of heat.
My guess turned out to be correct.
Kili was probably generating dark matter in sizes smaller than the eye could see, spreading that dark matter in the area. Although I did not know how wide the area was, it could be described as Kili's zone of control. I was at

her mercy as long as I was within that zone, which was why she could be that confident.
But tiny the dark matter may be, this also had a weakness as a result. Small pieces of dark matter would vanish just from being covered by light smoke like this.
"You saw through my realm of calamitous flame, Muspelheim—I'm impressed. How about this move then?"
On the other side of the smoke, Kili apparently laughed.
I instantly felt my hairs stand on end. Instinct told me this was leading to death. I instantly dug my heels in the ground for emergency braking.
Many dark particles appeared in the white smoke.
It was as though black snow was floating up from the ground.
This time, while shrouded in white smoke, Kili was spreading out dark matter that was large enough not to be eliminated by the smoke.
I had stepped into a world of black snow. This was a realm that I could not escape even if I saw it.
Anti-explosive armor—Uruk 73E!
I hit the ground in desperation and formed a shield to cover myself. This was the only method of handling an omnidirectional attack using my meager generating capacity.
However, red light caused the shield to crack.
"…!?"
First came a thunderous noise, then heat and force that shook my entire body. Unable to understand what had happened, I rolled on the ground, tasting fresh blood and soil in my mouth. Then intense pain rocked my brain.
My entire body felt scorched and painful. I could no longer tell where I was wounded, but at least I was still alive.
—Move if you're still alive! Stopping means dying!
I spurred myself to get up and check out the situation. I was apparently blown far away by the explosion, distancing me from Kili. The dark matter enveloping Kili's surroundings did not reach my location.
With exception, all Ds had limits to their dark matter generating capacity. If every particle increased in size, that Muspelheim ability she mentioned would cover a smaller area.
I wanted to enter a combat stance but discovered that my left arm could not move. Taking a closer look, I found a fragment of my shield stabbed into my shoulder. The bleeding flowed along my arm and dripped on the ground.
In the distance, Tia seemed to be yelling something, but the explosion had disabled my ears, preventing me from hearing clearly.
Kili also made an expression certain of victory as though saying something, but I still could not hear. Neither was there any need for me to listen.
—Because I was about to kill her next.
"Huff... Huff... Huff..."

My irregular breathing echoed in the depths of my ears, sounding very vague and unclear.
The intense pain centered on my shoulder was preventing my mind from operating smoothly.
The harder it was to think, the more the emptiness in my mind spread.
Some kind of existence was gradually expanding its borders.
"Huff..... Huff..... Hah..... Hah....."
The interval between breaths lengthened, exhaling became acute, inhaling became silent.
The monster of the unconscious did not miss the opening when my consciousness grew faint, gradually taking control of my body. From my fingertips to the beating of my heart, everything fell under its control, switching me with a different being.
"———..."
Finally taking a deep breath, then it stopped.
I was no longer myself at this point.
He started to walk slowly towards Kili. Gradually, he accelerated. Every time the tip of the foot kicked the ground, he increased his speed slightly.
An expression of surprise surfaced on Kili's face.
Simply by stepping in the domain shrouded in black snow, the outcome would be the same as previously. This was obvious.
However, a certain existence that was not me was completely unfazed, approaching the prey head on.
All I could feel was heat scorching my left hand. Rather than originating from my wounded shoulder, the back of my hand felt scorched as though by fire.
I did not know the reason. Neither could I think.
However, the Fafnir currently in control of my power should understand everything.
Surely after understanding, he must have chosen the simplest way to kill Kili then put it into action.
—Running began.
He invaded Kili's Muspelheim at top speed.
Kili yelled out with a nervous expression. Instantly, the view was covered by red flames. The atmosphere was set aflame from the thermal energy transmuted from dark matter.
However... He did not stop.
Fafnir broke through the blazing fire and ran along the ground.
I felt neither pain nor scorching heat.
Were my senses numb? Or did I turn into a monster unfazed by explosions?
My current self could not understand either.
I could see a small white light flashing in my view, but I had no idea what it meant.
Kili's expression was full of shock.
"WHY!?"

Due to closing the distance, I only heard sound for the first time.
As though responding to her, Fafnir roared.
"GAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"
Language no longer had meaning, what it needed was sharp fangs for hunting prey.
Roaring, he used his right hand to draw out a shield fragment that was stabbed in the left shoulder. Blood instantly splattered around from the bleeding wound.
"Muspelheim!"
Kili extended her palm, firing a red flash of light.
That was probably the attack that had broken my anti-explosive armor just now.
Nevertheless, Fafnir did not take any evasive action. Instead, he casually swung his right arm.
With a faint flash of white light, the scenery was distorted for a brief instant.
Immediately, the red light's trajectory became mysteriously bent, flying off in another direction.
"Could that power actually be that of 'White'—"
Baring its fangs, Fafnir closed in on the bewildered Kili.
Then swinging the sharp fragment, all covered in fresh blood—
...Honoka...!
—I stabbed the fragment's sharp edge deeply into Kili's body.
My right hand could feel the sensation of slicing through flesh.
"Cough..."
Kili spat blood, splattering on my face. Having recovered control from Fafnir, I felt an unpleasant stickiness and moistness from the warmth of life and the smell of fresh blood.
"Cough, cough... Cough..... Fu... Fufu... Liar."
Blood flowing from the corner of her mouth, Kili laughed.
"..."
I did not answer. Simply feeling the temperature of the blood flowing from Kili's abdomen, I cursed my naivete.
"Clearly saying you were going to kill me... yet you avoided vitals in the final moment... Why?"
"...My hand slipped. Even if it's not a vital, this is already a severe injury. If it's not treated immediately, you'll die from blood loss. So—Surrender."
My instincts told me I should kill Kili now.
Even so, I still stopped Fafnir at the crucial moment, that was because... I recalled Honoka's smile. Despite knowing clearly it was fake, I could not erase my feelings from that time.
"Fufu... How kind of you. But your kindness is meaningless, because even if you were to pierce my heart, the result doesn't change."
Kili whispered in my ear then shoved me away. Next, she reached out and grabbed the shield fragment embedded in her abdomen.

"Hold on! If you pull it out, the bleeding will—"
I called out to stop her, but Kili pulled out the fragment without heeding me. Blood gushed out from the wound, dripping audibly on the ground forming a dark red stain.
But the instant black masses of dark matter appeared in the wound's surroundings, the bleeding immediately stopped. After Kili wiped the blood stains away, there was no wound there anymore, only pale skin.
"No way..."
Seeing me surprised, Kili shrugged.
"How is it? This is what biogenic transmutation is about. If you want to kill me, you have to aim here."
Kili tapped her head with her fingertip and smiled faintly.
"Damn it!"
I had to start all over again. With unsteady steps, I back away.
"You don't need to be so flustered. If possible, I'd like to take Tia away peacefully, but it looks like time's up."
Looking at me in my combat stance, Kili smiled wryly.
"Making such a big scene... How dare you talk about peace. Also... Time's up? What the heck do you mean by time's up?"
Not understanding what she meant, I stayed on guard and asked:
"Despite how I may look to you... I do want to keep harm to the Ds to a minimum. But due to your meddling, she seems to have lost patience."
RUMBLE~~~~——...!
No sooner had Kili spoke than the ground immediately shook. I looked up to see Hekatonkheir, originally motionless, starting to turn its body towards us.
"...Hekatonkheir—"
"I told her I'll be the one to secure Tia and asked her to wait there, but looks like she decided to take action herself. Prepare yourselves—She's not going to be as nice as me, okay?"
She? Asked her to wait...?
"...What's your relationship with Hekatonkheir? That thing... Isn't it your fictional armament?"
Looking at the blue phosphorescent giant, I asked Kili.
I had speculated that Hekatonkheir might be someone's fictional armament and the enemy's target was Tia. However, judging from what she just said, it sounded like Hekatonkheir was not under Kili's control at least.
"Fufu—How could that be possible? Even if it's me, I can't create a fictional armament that large. No, rather... In fact, I've already told you lots about her, you know?"
"Already... told me?"
"You don't get it? How slow."
Kili laughed in mockery.
Was she avoiding the topic? Or was she speaking the truth? I could not tell.

But judging from the way things looked, it would be better to regard Hekatonkheir as a dragon, probably.
RUMBLE!
Then Midgard shook again, because Hekatonkheir started walking, and it was in our direction—
That scene forced me to recall from three years ago, the scene of Hekatonkheir advancing towards our town. The footsteps of destruction were heard mercilessly. The closer that gigantic body approached, the narrower the night sky seemed.
...In the end, that thing must still be defeated?
Just as my attention was drawn to Hekatonkheir, Kili turned her gaze to Tia.
"—I will ask you one last time."
Tia was hugging the unconscious Lisa while watching our battle. At this moment, her shoulders shook.
Most likely in Tia's heart, the fear of Kili's power was already deeprooted.
Seeing Tia unable to even respond, Kili asked her:
"Are you willing to become Basilisk's mate? For everyone, no matter whom... Even for you, it would be a happy choice."
...!
Stop talking crap—Just as I was about to yell that, Tia answered quietly.
"...No."
Kili frowned.
"By this point, you still want to live as a human? Don't be silly, you're already a dragon. There's no way you can mingle among humans. Your parents originally planned to—"
"Tia doesn't get it! Tia doesn't get something so difficult! Tia only doesn't want to separate from Yuu and Lisa!"
Hugging the injured Lisa tightly, Tia yelled loudly.
Perhaps woken up by her voice, Lisa opened one eye.
"...Tia... -san?"
"Everyone is so warm... These are Tia's happiest times ever... So Tia wants to stay here! And Tia wants to be Yuu's wife! Compared to Basilisk, Tia super super super loves Yuu!!"
Tia...
Hearing the expression of her sincere feelings, too direct for comfort, I felt my face heat up.
Confronted with Tia's upfront will of rejection, Kili stared silently at her then sighed deeply.
"Really...? How unfortunate. My action was really taken in your interests."
"You're saying it was for us? Attacking Midgard, hurting Lisa, how dare you say something like that?"
Hearing Kili's presumptuous claim, I could not help but protest.
"Once Basilisk lands, the disaster will definitely surpass this. Everything will return to dust, leaving no survivors. That was why I wanted to take Tia over to Basilisk before all the Ds perish, and in much gentler way than hers."

Speaking in a serious tone, Kili glanced up at Hekatonkheir. She sounded like she was worrying about us, but I could feel that she was still simply treating Ds as resources.
"Mind your own business. We will defeat Basilisk and protect Tia."
"In that case, you have to find a way to handle her first. I'll be leaving before I get trampled in the chaos. After all, it's almost time for Midgardsormr to restart from a different circuit after it was temporarily disabled when the core was damaged."
After saying that, Kili flew up into the sky, her entire body wrapped in flame. Rather than using air, she was flying by jet propulsion through the transmutation of combustion.
Looking down at us from the air, Kili continued:
"A word of advice, she—mother—isn't going to listen to pleas for mercy."
Mother...?
Speaking of which, Honoka had said that she and her mother traveled all over the world. Her email also said that her mother would be visiting Midgard in the near future, but I never expected she was referring to Hekatonkheir.
Seeing Kili gradually rise in height, I asked her:
"Kili... Who the heck are you?"
Capable of using biogenic transmutation, impossible to handle by the human brain, calling Hekatonkheir mother, this girl—I really did not think she was an ordinary D.
"God knows who I am? If it's okay with you, can I ask you to decide?"
"...Meaning you don't intend to answer?"
"I have no intention of avoiding the subject... Whatever, I'm off now—If the same miracle happens as three years ago, we shall meet again."
Saying that, Kili immediately rose in the starry sky, leaving a red trail.
Kili knew about my battle against Hekatonkheir three years ago?
Many questions occupied my heart.
RUMBLE~~~~—...!
However, but my consciousness was pulled back to reality by the giant footsteps that sounded even nearer than just now.
Swaying its giant body, Hekatonkheir approached step by step. Although blindingly bright explosions kept occurring in its surroundings, Hekatonkheir did not stop walking. Most likely, the assembled Counter-Dragon Squad was trying to push it towards the sea.
If what Kili said was true, Hekatonkheir's goal was also to capture Tia. The original plan was probably to have Hekatonhheir destroy the core facilities to draw everyone's attention, thus allowing Kili to seize the opportunity to take Tia away while Midgardsormr was paralyzed.
However, due to interference from Lisa and me, Hekatonkheir was taking matters into its own hands now.
But... With such a huge body, how was it going to capture Tia who was even smaller than its finger?

"Nii-san!"
Hearing Mitsuki's voice, I looked in her direction.
I saw Mitsuki and Iris appear from the side of the dorm, running towards us.
"Sorry, I arrived late because I was issuing orders to the gathered Counter-Dragon Squad. Are you guys alright?"
"...I'm alright. You should check Lisa's condition first."
I tore off a sleeve that was already tattered. Biting the cloth's edge, I wrapped it around the wound. Although the cut was deep, it was fine as long as I stopped the bleeding first.
"Lisa-chan, are you okay!?"
Iris knelt down next to Lisa and asked with worry.
"This bit of injury is nothing. Rather than being concerned with me, we must find a way to handle that..."
Lisa stood up unsteadily and looked up at the approaching Hekatonkheir.
Our gazes were all fixed upon the blue giant.
"All members of the Counter-Dragon Squad are in position. Although our pace was disrupted slightly by Hekatonkheir beginning to move suddenly... As long as we time things right, we will surely push it back this time. Everyone, please lend me your assistance."
Mitsuki called out to us."
"Yes, of course."
"Yup! Feel free to give orders, Mitsuki-chan!"
Iris and I nodded.
"I can still fight."
Lisa manifested her fictional armament in her hand again and smiled with determination.
"Tia will... fight too."
Tia's voice was heard. Everyone looked at her in surprise.
"Can you? If you lose control again, let alone help, you may end up dragging everyone down."
Lisa bluntly stated the unease in everyone's heart.
"—Yes, no problem. Even though Tia has horns and might not be human anymore, even so... Tia still wants to stay with Yuu and Lisa. Tia wants to live the same way as everyone!"
Tia made her stance clear.
Even though she could not change her existence, she still could choose her way of living.
By her own will, Tia was choosing to walk into the future together with us.
"I understand. Then as comrades—We shall fight our hardest."
Lisa made a gentle expression and extended her hand. All smiles, Tia held her hand tightly.
Having checked their condition, Mitsuki pressed her communicator and issued orders to everyone.

"—Well then, everyone, please follow my countdown. All units perform air transmutation of maximum scale. Please aim for the stomach, the center of gravity! Counting down! Nine!!"
Following Mitsuki's orders, Iris and Lisa raised their fictional armaments.
Tia also generated dark matter in the surroundings to form her fictional armament.
Appearing in the same manner as last time, the dark matter gathered around Tia, but the outline sculpted was different.
What appeared was a giant pair of wings, shining with red light.
In a human's form with dragon's wings sprouted from her back, Tia even gave off a holy impression.
If seeking power, it was inevitable that Tia would choose something whose appearance approached that of dragons. But no one would blame her because in spite of that, Tia still said that she was going to live as a human like us.
"Seven, six, five—"
During the countdown, I concentrated and waited for the opportunity for me to make a move.
Perhaps noticing that something was unusual because the attacks stopped suddenly, Hekatonkheir raised its giant right hand.
But it was fine, there was quite a bit of distance. It was unable to attack our location.
That was what things should have been like—
But the sky turned dark and the stars suddenly went out of sight, because something dark—blocked them.
"Eh?"
A giant palm was over our heads by the time we realized.
Resembling a drawing with perspective errors, Hekatonkheir's arm was extending unnaturally.
Wait—It was extending!?
There was no precedent of Hekatonkheir changing its body shape before but dragons were unknown existences to begin with. There was nothing surprising even if they possessed previously unconfirmed abilities.
Perhaps due to conservation of mass, the arm became thinner as it extended. Even so, the palm was still too gigantic to escape. As though compressing the atmosphere, it descended.
"Hey—Tia's here too, you know!?"
I looked up at the palm and yelled loudly but it could not possibly understand me.
And even if Hekatonkheir's movements were delicate even to pick up only Tia, those of us in the surroundings would surely get flattened.
"Switch target to right arm! Countdown cancelled! Attack directly!!"
Deciding that there was no time for the countdown to finish, Mitsuki swiftly yelled out.
"O gale, explode!"

Iris caused compressed air to explode.
"Make haste, spear of wind!"
Lisa shot out concentrated wind.
"Fly!!"
Tia spread her red wings and started a storm.
The entire island shook intensely. The massive amount of air produced by everyone deflected Hekatonkheir's right hand upwards.
However, Hekatonkheir then extended its left hand towards us.
The sky was blotted by a blue palm again.
Because everyone had just fired attacks at full power, very few people had the energy to attack again.
Only Mitsuki and Lisa were able to attack a second time immediately.
"Lisa-san, take care of the left hand by destroying it! Please use your strongest attack!"
"Understood!"
Mitsuki nocked an arrow of dark matter onto the iridescent bow whereas Lisa aimed her golden spear at the sky.
"Terminating Arrow—Last Quark!"
"Pierce, divine spear!!"
Mitsuki and Lisa's attack turned the sky white, vaporizing Hekatonkheir's left arm. The attack's destructive power was astounding. The expanding beam of light even swallowed Hekatonkheir's main body.
When the wind and light from the blast subsided, the only parts of Hekatonkheir remaining were the right arm in the air and the lower half in the distance.
The lower half's outline began to collapse, breaking up and disappearing like bubbles.
After that, the remaining right arm expanded and Hekatonkheir was instantly restored.
RUMBLE~~~~——...
Shaking the ground, Hekatonkheir landed next to us.
"Kyah!?"
The intense shock and wind caused Mitsuki and the others to fall down.
Unable to maintain balance, I knelt on my knees.
Due to being too close, even if I looked up, I could only see up to its waist.
Also, the restored left hand was approaching us.
Its movements were far too quick. Now driven by a goal, Hekatonkheir had turned to an enemy even more formidable than three years ago.
What should we do...!?
Due to falling down, everyone had released their fictional weapons. At this rate, everyone will—!
"...!"
I raised my arm to generate all the dark matter at my disposal.
But I stopped my motion at this time. My thoughts halted.

I could not think of any solution. Game over was fast approaching. There was no time to construct an anti-dragon weapon.
—Tell me! Fafnir! Tell me how to kill this thing!
I yelled in my heart, but the slumbering monster of the unconscious did not respond.
Actually, I knew long ago that Fafnir was purely a trump card against humans. It was useless against dragons.
However...
—Neun, request activation—
I heard a mechanical voice in my head.
Yggdrasil... Huh?
The voice belonged to "Green" Yggdrasil, the one I made a deal with three years ago to defeat Hekatonkheir. In a robotic voice devoid of emotion, Yggdrasil spoke on its own to me.
—By exterminating Vier, Leviathan, authority inherited. Request activation, Code Vier. Request activation, antigravity—
"Anti... gravity?"
It wa the power of repulsive fields possessed by Leviathan—
The instant I uttered that word, the dragon mark on my left hand heated up and gave off pure white light. That glow was the same light as what I saw in the battle against Kili after handing my body over to Fafnir.
—Crack!
White cracks appeared in the mass of dark matter generated in front of my left hand. With a resounding crunch, like breaking a shell, the dark matter turned from black to white.
In that instant, I felt my entire body enveloped in a floating feeling.
"Kyah!?"
I heard Iris scream and looked back to see everyone in the surroundings floating in the air. Fallen leaves on the ground were also floating lightly as though in water.
More unbelievably, Hekatonkheir's hand, originally directly above, also stopped falling, remaining in midair. Even Hekatonkheir's gigantic body was hovering slightly.
"Nii-san... Could that actually be... antigravitional matter...?"
Looking at the white sphere in my hand, Mitsuki asked in surprise.
But even if she asked me, I had no idea.
However, I had felt the same scorching on the back of my left hand when fighting Kili. Fafnir had deflected her attack matter-of-factly, if that was antigravity—the result of a repulsive field—it basically made sense.
But I had no concrete evidence and there was no time to explain either.
What was important right now was not to miss this excellent opportunity.
The white sphere produced from dark matter gradually shrunk. Suppose the current phenomenon was going to stop when this thing disappeared, we had to hurry and act.
"Mitsuki! Anyway, let's use this opportunity to attack again!"

"—I understand, all units prepare the next attack! Target is the center of the chest! Counting down! Five!"
Mitsuki instantly resumed an expression as the Counter-Dragon Squad's captain and issued orders to everyone.
Hence, while floating in an unstable posture, everyone manifested their fictional armaments anew and aimed at the floating Hekatonkheir.
"Four, three, two, one—Attack!"
Wind from various locations on the island gathered together and struck Hekatonkheir directly in the chest In a state of weightlessness, Hekatonkheir's upper body tilted back greatly from the impact. The gigantic body flew high in the sky.
Then the white sphere finally vanished and gravity returned to normal in the surroundings.
"Kyah!?"
Just as Iris and the girls fell on their bottoms, I landed on my feet and looked up into the sky.
That gigantic Hekatonkheir was knocked flying to an unbelievable height. At this rate, it was probably going to fall into the sea as we hoped, but the resulting impact would be hard to estimate. What was certain was that the resulting tidal wave would be disastrous for Midgard. In that case—
"Tia, lend me your strength. I will destroy that thing in the air."
Saying that, I extended my left hand to Tia.
"Just by... holding hands?"
"Yes, I'm counting on you."
I nodded affirmatively. Tia's little fingers interlocked with mine and held my hand tightly.
"Tia is Yuu's wife... so Tia will work hard with husband."
"Thank you, Tia, then let's blow that thing away!"
I extended my right palm sideways and let the blueprint in my mind flow into the generated dark matter.
Tia's fictional armament, the red wings, turned into tiny particles, mixing together with my dark matter.
"Anti-dragon armament—Marduk!"
The constructed turret was a lost weapon from a pre-civilization that existed long ago.
But this was only one part of the enormous weapon known as Marduk. During the battle against Leviathan, it was Marduk's main cannon that had inflicted the decisive blow. Right now, I was making the weapon of extermination that had destroyed that thing three years ago too. Having obtained additional data, I now knew its name—
"—Special artillery, Megiddo!!"
The giant barrel took form through transmutation. Its external appearance had what seemed like strange geometric patterns, giving off an impression different from other civilizations. Due to it being only one part of a gigantic

weapon, after all, its structure was incomplete. There were exposed wires and pipes all over the place. It would break from just one shot.
However, one shot was all that was needed.
While I stared at the Hekatonkheir floating in the starry sky, the turret connected to my mind moved automatically, aiming at the giant whose flying trajectory gradually turned to descent.
"Let's do it—"
"Okay!"
Hearing me shout, Tia responded. Dark matter was transmitted through our tightly connected hands. I turned it into the bullet's energy—
"—FIRE!!"
I fired Megiddo's boundary-incinerating blue flames.
A bullet shining with blue light was sucked straight into Hekatonkheir's body… Then a massive explosion swallowed even the giant's body.
The scene was like a blue sun had suddenly appeared in the night sky. Because it was too bright, it caused the stars to disappear from the sky, even making distinct shadows on the ground.
Then the blue light dimmed. When darkness returned to the world of night, the giant blotting the sky had disappeared completely.
"How are things…?"
I looked into the sky for a while then checked the surroundings, observing the situation.
Hekatonkheir was an immortal monster, which was why I could not lower my guard immediately.
But just like three years ago, no matter how long I waited, the blue giant did not reappear. With peace returned to the night forest, the sounds of bugs calling gradually began.
"Hekatonkheir… was defeated?"
Tia looked up at me and asked.
"Yeah… Looks like it was defeated."
I spoke hesitantly and Mitsuki nodded in agreement.
"Usually it would have resurrected by this time. Considering the case three years ago, the chances of completely defeating Hekatonkheir are extremely slim but in any case, we seem to have succeeded in driving it away from Midgard."
"Wonderful! We won!"
Iris cheered and the tense atmosphere finally eased up.
"Goodness gracious… It made us expend so much effort."
Lisa was apparently at her limit. As her knees gave way, she sat down on a bush.
"Hey, are you okay?"
"Lisa!"
Tia and I rushed over to her side and steadied her.
"…No need to worry about me, rather… The color in your face is looking quite terrible."

Lisa looked up at me and smiled wryly.
Speaking of which, I felt my vision shake. I touched my left shoulder to discover the cloth wrapped around the wound completely wet. Perhaps I had lost too much blood.
Seeing the way we looked, Mitsuki instantly called somewhere through her communicator.
"—Second command center, please respond. Is anyone there? Please respond—Oh... Shinomiya-sensei, so you are safe and sound. This is Mononobe Mitsuki, there are two wounded here—Please send paramedics as soon as possible."
Wonderful... So Shinomiya-sensei was safe.
Hearing the news, I breathed a sigh of relief. Beause the clock tower was destroyed, I had been worrying the whole time.
But who knew where the principal's office, located at the top of the clock tower, had flown after getting struck by Hekatonkheir's swipe. If the principal and Mica-san were there—
I was filled with gloom. But just at this moment, the surrounding bushes rustled and a golden head poked out.
"Curses! What a tragic occurrence! Ahhh... My, my room... My treasured collection... Unforgivable, unforgivable! That blue puppet!"
Muttering to herself in an angry tone was the principal of indeterminate age. All covered in dirt with her clothing tattered, but she did not seem harmed.
"Charlotte-sama, that was because you built your personal room in that sort of place on purpose. As the saying goes, a certain type of person and smoke both prefer high places. It is very true."
Behind the principal, out appeared a woman in a maid uniform—Mica-san. Her clothing had holes all over the place but she looked very energetic. Discovering us, the two of them walked over.
"Wow, you guys are fine too. How wonderful, I was worried about you."
"No, that's our line... I can't believe you stayed safe. Weren't you at the principal's office at the time?"
I asked in surprise.
"Hmph, something of that level's not going to—Mmmph!"
The principal puffed out her chest and nodded but Mica-san muffled her from behind.
"Indeed, Charlotte-sama and I happened to go out together for a stroll in the night. What a close call."
Smiling, Mica-san answered.
"O-Oh... I see, that's wonderful."
They had apparently emerged from the bushes opposite to the school campus' direction, but confronted with Mica-san's intimidating aura, I could only nod and concur.
But if they not possibly be unharmed if they really were in the office that was sent flying. Perhaps they had escaped into the jungle then gotten lost.

"Eh..."
Perhaps because I relaxed all at once after confirming that everyone I was worrying about was safe, I felt a sudden wave of dizziness.
"H-Hey, what are you doing!?"
I was originally supporting Lisa but ended up leaning on her unknowingly.
Boing, my face became surrounded by something big and soft.
"Oh no, Yuu! Don't cheat!"
Although I heard Tia's voice, my body could no longer exert any force.
"Seriously... I only permit you specially just this once."
I heard Lisa's quiet whispers by my ear while my head was caressed gently.
Embraced by a sensation of comfort, I fell into deep sleep—

Part 4

In the sky dozens of kilometers away from Midgard, Kili Surtr Muspelheim was watching the blue light shining in the distance.
"What is this? Mother, you were defeated."
With a hand to her mouth, Kili smiled in delight.
"To think that flame has transcended the boundary again… Sure enough, what happened three years ago was not a miracle. Mother must be in pain on the other side, ahhh, serves her right."
Perhaps feeling excited, Kili spun in circles and danced in the night sky before laughing sonorously.
"This is the outcome when you interfere without permission. If only you had refrained from unnecessary meddling, I would have found a chance to bring Tia out... Looks like you really are rather anxious."
Kili flew nimbly through the air and murmured. She looked back towards Midgard, which had sunk beneath the horizon, and smiled, partially closing her eyes.
"However, with this, mother and I are out of options. Regardless which side wins, they or Basilisk, the initial plan will fail. When that time comes, you will no longer be able to hide, right? Perhaps they might discover Hekatonkheir's true nature soon."
Kili untied her hair, allowing it to flutter apart in the wind. As though talking to someone, she said:
"...No matter what the outcome, mother will probably lament the heavy losses. But as long as he wins, I shall profit, because—"
Saying that, Kili pressed her hand on her abdomen.
Lovingly caressing the spot where his fang had struck, Kili smiled.
"—Perhaps he might be a dragon worthy enough to be my partner."

Epilogue

I opened my eyes to see a ceiling of pure white. An antiseptic smell brushed lightly against my nose.
—This place is...?
I wanted to get up but a wave of intense pain from my left shoulder forced me to stop moving. As soon as I became aware of pain, in addition to my left shoulder, even my right shoulder and the palm of my right hand were also aching.
The parts in pain seemed to be bandaged. As soon as I exerted force, I would feel resistance.
I could hear someone breathing in deep sleep nearby.
Hence, I turned my head to check out my surroundings.
This was apparently a sickroom. I was lying on a bed. On my bed's two sides were respectively Iris and Tia. Sitting on pipe chairs, the two of them were asleep, sprawled on the sickbed's sheets.
But perhaps sensing my body's minor movements, Tia's shoulder twitched.
"Yuu! You woke up!?"
Tia suddenly looked up and leaned forward on the bed as though she was going to on top of me.
"Y-Yeah, I just woke up."
Hearing my somewhat flustered answer, Tia had tears welling up in her eyes.
"So glad... Tia was wondering what to do if Yuu didn't wake up..."
"That's way too exaggerated. I'm not so weak that I'd die from this little bit of injury."
I answered with a wry smile.
Actually, I wanted to wipe her tears away but such a delicate motion was not possible with both hands wrapped in bandages.
"But Lisa recovered so quickly... yet Yuu did not wake up for so long..."
"I see... So Lisa's injuries were very light... That's good to know."
Because I had witnessed her smashing hard in the wall, I was quite relieved to know she was fine.
This implied how sturdy was the barrier of wind that Lisa had deployed. Added to the fact that she was clearly unversed in anti-personnel combat, Lisa's abilities were truly astounding for her to be able to protect Tia singlehandedly before I hurried to the scene.

—Had it not been for Lisa's efforts, Kili would have taken Tia away already.
I really had to thank her.
"Yuu..... Thank you."
For some reason, Tia thanked me.
"Eh? Why so suddenly?"
Not understanding why she thanked me suddenly, I asked, perplexed.
"Because Yuu fought for Tia. Tia has already thanked Lisa and the others and also borrowed Mitsuki's communicator to thank other people, but Tia has not... thanked Yuu yet."
"...I see now, but it's a bit too soon for thanks, you know? Because we might have to fight Basilisk next."
Although the optimistic view was that Basilisk could not traverse the ocean to here, but things were probably not going to be that easy. Kili had intended to take Tia away to avoid a battle between the Ds and Basilisk, so even if separated by the sea, Basilisk was still advancing towards Midgard.
"Yeah... But because of that, Tia feels that thanks is even more required."
Precisely because Tia had chosen the same way of life as us, she understood how many people were devoting their full efforts for her sake. She wanted to express her thanks as one of us.
I moved my body. The left hand seemed to be a lost cause, but my right hand could barely manage some movement.
"—You're a good girl, Tia."
I used my bandaged right hand to clumsily stroke Tia's head. Because my right hand only suffered minor burns, it did not hurt very much even when I used it to touch Tia.
"Ahaha, it tickles."
Tia moved her head and rubbed her horn against my hand.
"Mm... Yuu's hand is so big..."
Like a cat, Tia purred and brought her face up close.
Looking at my face at close range, Tia moved her tiny lips and whispered.
"Yuu... Tia really loves Yuu, so let's get married, okay?"
"What... W-Wait! What are you suddenly talking about—"
The sudden proposal made me panic.
"Not sudden at all. Tia has said all along that Tia will become Yuu's wife. Although that was speaking as a dragon before... But this time, Tia wants to marry Yuu as a human. Do you dislike it?"
"R-Rather than dislike, that's not the issue here—"
I was quite shaken. At this moment, Tia brought her face even closer.
"...Let's seal the oath with a kiss."
"Slow down, slow down! I said before, right? According to human rules, we haven't reached the age to get married yet! So you must calm down!"
I frantically said to Tia.
"...Tia can't marry Yuu?"
Tia widened her eyes, tilting her head questioningly.

"Y-You can't, although it varies between countries... but basically, I think... it probably isn't allowed... I suppose."
Because I did not know Tia's nationality, my words showed a tone of uncertainty but I tried my hardest to persuade her.
"Then it can't be helped..."
Tia sighed with a regretful expression. Having chosen to live as a human, Tia seemed like she planned to obey the rules for sure.
—Tia still needed time.
Initially, she wanted to marry me because Kili had indoctrinated her with the notion that "you were born to marry a dragon."
Her intense obsession also came as an exaggerated reaction to the fear of not wanting to be alone. As long as she became closer friends with everyone, that kind of obsession would gradually weaken, so Tia needed time to re-examine her own feelings.
But after listening to my explanation, Tia, who should have accepted my viewpoint already, somehow brought her face even closer.
"...Then an engagement now is fine."
"Huh?"
Smooch, Tia's soft lips kissed me on the cheek. Then she separated very quickly.
"Then we are fiances now."
Tia smiled happily.
On the other hand, I stared blankly while holding my hand against my cheek.
I was not shocked by how sudden it happened rather it was the word fiance that inexplicably evoked nostalgia in me.
For some reason, Mitsuki's face surface in my mind for an instant.
Tia's bold behavior and that strange sense of deja vu made me feel quite troubled.
Frozen on the spot like that, I pondered how to answer... Suddenly, I felt my mattress shake.
Getting a bad feeling, I turned to face the other side of my bed, only to meet the gaze of Iris who had a stiff smile on her face. She had apparently woken up without me realizing it.
"H-Hold on! Tia-chan! W-What did you just do!?"
Iris asked in shrill voice.
"What else, a kiss of engagement! Because it's an engagement, it's a kiss on the cheek. After marriage, it'll be a kiss on the lips."
"W-W-W-W-W-What—N-No!"
Iris yelled with her face all red.
"No 'no.' Tia already kissed, so you're too late."
"I-If it's kissing, I've kissed him too!"
"Ehhh!?"

Hearing what Iris said, Tia showed a shocked expression. Also feeling frantic from her sudden declaration, I could not help but interrupt their conversation."
"H-Hey Iris! Now's the time to be talking about this—"
"But... If I don't bring it up, doesn't that make you Tia-chan's fiance, Mononobe?"
Iris glared at me tearfully, making me flustered.
"No, Tia just doesn't understand about engagements and marriages. No, rather... W-Why do you need to compete with her on this?"
With an uneasy feeling, I asked her hesitantly.
"Eh? U-Umm well..."
Iris blushed and awkwardly lowered her head. An embarrassing atmosphere settled in between Iris and me.
"Hmph! Yuu, turn over here!"
But Tia grabbed my face and forced me to turn and face her direction.
"Oh, don't force him! Mononobe is a patient!"
Saying that, Iris turned my head back to its original position.
"Towards Tia, Yuu will definitely be more lively!"
Then Tia pulled my head again.
"Jeez, I already said no!"
Pouting, Iris hugged my head and resisted.
"Hey, t-this is really uncomfortable!"
Her soft bosom was pressing on my face, almost suffocating me. The warmth and fragrance of her skin was making me dizzy.
Then with Tia and Iris grabbing my head, they glared at each other across the sickbed.
"Even if Iris got engaged to Yuu first, Tia won't lose to you!"
"Ehhh? Does it count as engaged for me too? U-Umm... I'm not ready yet..."
Hearing Tia say that, Iris got very awkward. With her frequently glancing in my direction, things were gradually going out of control. Just at this moment, I heard the sound of the sickroom's door getting opened.
"What are you arguing about? There are patients in other sickrooms, so will you all be quiet please."
These stern words caused Tia and Iris to shut their mouths.
I turned my head toward the entrance, only to see Lisa standing there. Behind her was Mitsuki, Firill, Ren and Ariella too.

"Oh Lisa… Sorry."
Tia suddenly became obedient. Leaving me, she apologized to Lisa.
"I'm sorry too."
Iris also bowed her head and apologized guiltily.
"It is wonderful that you two understand, but I guessed it was most likely because he had awakened. Well then—How are you feeling, Mononobe Yuu?"
I saw Lisa tossing her hair while she asked me cordially.
"…My left arm can't move at the moment but the rest seem okay."
"I see… Then you must be facing numerous inconveniences. If you run into any trouble here on, tell me any time and I will do my best to help."
"Huh…?"
Hearing words that seemed too gentle for Lisa, I could not help but make an awkward sound.
"What's the matter? Did I say something weird?"
"No… Nothing, umm, thank you."
"Not at all. Mutual assistance during trouble is the proper thing to do."
Lisa nodded matter-of-factly.
Right, that was simply the kind of person Lisa was. Stepping up for the sake of friends, taking care of the the injured and those in trouble. She was the kind of person who could do those things matter-of-factly.
"I really have to think you. Lisa, you're probably the best 'good woman' I've ever met."
"What… W-What do you mean by that? I won't forgive you if it is sexual harassment, got that?"
Lisa went red in the face and glared at me with an angry expression.
"Hmm? Oh, I was just purely praising your character… Meaning that you're someone worthy of respect. However… Even in the sense of being a *beauty*, I think you're a good woman too, you know?"
I thought praising her personality alone would be rude, so I added my honest thoughts as well.
"~~~~!?"
Lisa's face grew increasingly red. I thought she was going to scold me but Lisa turned around just like that and walked rapidly out of the sickroom.
"…Nice."
For some reason, Firill made the thumbs-up at me then went to chase Lisa.
"Mononobe-kun… You need to take responsibility for your words, okay?"
"Mm!"
Ariella spoke with exasperation while Ren kept nodding on the side.
Then the two of them followed Firill out of the room, leaving Mitsuki, Iris and Tia.
"So Mononobe… likes Lisa-chan's type…"
"Ooh… Tia can't match Lisa."

Iris and Tia looked disheartened for some reason and kept murmuring to themselves. Meanwhile, Mitsuki watched me coldly. Coughing twice at this moment, she spoke to Iris and Tia.
"—Excuse me, but I currently have important matters to discuss with Nii-san. Since it involves classified military information, could you two please go away for a while?"
"Yes..."
"Got it..."
Iris and Tia answered listlessly then obediently exited the sickroom. With only the two of us left, Mitsuki sat down on Iris' original seat and stared at my face.
"...Although I also respect Lisa-san's character, I still consider what you said just now to be sexual harassment."
With her index finger pressing my forehead, Mitsuki spoke.
"Urgh... I'll apologize to Lisa later, so could you let me off on the reflection essay?"
"—What am I going to do with you? Since you are a patient, Nii-san, I shall turn a blind eye for today. Were you in good health, Nii-san, I would have subjected you to the punishment of a forehead flick."
Tapping my forehead lightly with her index finger, Mitsuki glared at me slightly.
"...Thank you for your kindness. Then what's this important matter? And you said it involves classified military information..."
"Basically an aftermath report and simple questioning. But looking ahead, it might be information that will end up being classified, so I asked them to leave."
Saying that, Mitsuki glanced at the sickroom's door.
"No one is eavesdropping."
I searched for presences then told Mitsuki.
"...Is that so? Then let us begin with the aftermath report. The casualties in this incident number twelve injured, of which two of them are Nii-san and Lisa-san. The remaining ten are clock tower staff. Fortunately, all ten of them were in the lower levels of the clock tower, hence there were no deaths."
"Thank goodness... It's fortunate that the principal and Mica-san weren't in the principal's office."
"Yes. Regarding the temporarily halted Midgardsormr, it has resumed operation once control was passed to the second command center. As for Hekatonkheir, we have confirmed that in the instant it appeared in Midgard, it had also vanished suddenly from Siberia, the place where we had been keeping track of its location."
Mitsuki explained fluently to me. I asked her:
"So that means that it warped over here from Siberia?"

"...No idea because there were no previous reports of it having such a power. Also, Hekatonkheir's resurrection is still unconfirmed and awaiting further investigation. However, the issue is—about you, Nii-san."
"About me?"
"Yes—Cancelling gravity temporarily... What was that Leviathan-esque power? From what I saw, Nii-san, it seemed as though you had made antigravitational matter..."
What Mitsuki wanted to ask about was how I used gravitational interference to stop Hekatonkheir's attack. But to be honest, I had no idea either why I could do that kind of thing. I had simply uttered the word 'antigravity' while urged by Yggdrasil.
"No, for no particular reason... I thought I might be able to do it, but ended up doing it for real..."
Hence, all I could do was answer ambiguously.
"I cannot believe you are saying that you were able to do it with no particular reason, that is truly troubling! Regarding the anti-dragon weapons, it has occurred to me that given my position, it would probably be best that I do not find out... But no matter what, Nii-san, you are hiding far too many things, aren't you?"
It seemed as though she was venting all the displeasure she had accumulated so far. Mitsuki approached me with great intensity in tone. We were already so close together that our noses were almost touching. Since I was lying in bed, I could not back away.
"...Sorry, Mitsuki, I'm definitely hiding things from you. But I really have no idea about the antigravitational matter."
"I see... Nii-san, so you insist on refusing to tell me?"
Mitsuki angrily glared at me from up close.
"No, like I said, I really—"
"In that case, you absolutely must answer the next question!"
"Huh?"
Mitsuki spoke up with a gaze even more serious than previous.
"Nii-san... Is it true that you and Iris-san kissed?"
"What, y-you heard that too?"
My voice went involuntarily hoarse.
"...You were probably not searching for presences then. I was outside the door the whole time."
"U-Umm... Don't tell me that Lisa and the others also...?"
"No, by the time Lisa-san and the others arrived, I had already been standing there a while because I missed the opportunity to enter the room... Hence, only I heard the part about the kiss."
Hearing her answer, I was slightly relieved, but Mitsuki overhearing it was still a terrible situation.
—Huh? Why was I so shaken?
Aversion to writing repentance essays was admittedly one of the reasons, but that could not explain why I was panicking so much.

"No, that's umm... I guess she wanted to reward me for the battle against Leviathan? Probably something like that..."
"In other words, you two really kissed?"
"Urgh... Y-Yeah."
I gave up resisting and nodded in admission, prompting Mitsuki to exhale deeply.
"...I see."
Without being angry, Mitsuki withdrew her face from me. She seemed tired. Leaning her back against the chair, Mitsuki looked much more petite than usual.
"Mitsuki?"
Worried about her, I called her name. Mitsuki immediately made a seemingly forced smile and said:
"You have apparently received Tia-san's kiss on engagement on your cheek too, but that was done by a child, so I shall not pursue the matter. However, please handle Iris-san's kiss with upfront honesty, okay? Otherwise, I shall regard your motives as impure and punish you to write repentance essays."
Despite her cheerful tone, her voice was trembling slightly.
"Okay... I understand."
Despite feeling troubled, I still nodded.
"Nevertheless, I must apologize too. I will apologize to Iris-san together with you, Nii-san."
Hearing Mitsuki speak in a tone of self-deprecation, I instantly frowned.
"Why?"
"Because... For Iris-san, it must have been her first kiss, but Nii-san, your first kiss was—with me..."
"Eh—"
Hearing that, my mind went blank because that kind of memory did not exist in my mind. Most likely, during the deal with Yggdrasil, it had vanished due to the download of weapon data. I felt pain in my chest... I became strongly aware of the emptiness left in my heart due to the loss of the promise.
"...As in Tia-san's case, it was something done by a child after all. Whether the kiss from back then or the promise in the past, please pretend they never happened. Please forget them."
Even though she was speaking to me with a sad look on her face, those memories no longer existed, yet—
I subconsciously reached out with my right hand and gripped Mitsuki's arm firmly.
"Nii-san...?"
"...I won't forget."
I pulled the troubled Mitsuki in front of my chest and tried hard to squeeze a voice out from my throat.
"..."
"I won't forget."

Although it was already a lost memory—Precisely because of that, I won't forget this fact. I won't forget the the fact that I had forgotten.
To prevent Mitsuki from showing sadness on her face, I was willing to do anything.
Even if something did not exist, I will still insist it did.
"Clearly when it already... does not matter."
Despite saying that, Mitsuki still clutched my clothing and pressed her forehead against my chest.
"How could it not matter? Even if lying, you're not allowed to tell me to pretend that memories never happened."
I hugged Mitsuki tightly with my right arm and spoke in a strong tone of voice. Precisely because memories had disappeared from my mind, I wanted Mitsuki to remember them more. I did not want her to think they were redundant memories.
"But Nii-san... I do not want to obstruct you and Iris-san."
"Come on, you, no matter what happens here on, I can never think of you as an obstruction, Mitsuki."
I said with exasperation from the bottom of my heart.
"...Seriously? I will not be a burden for you, Nii-san?"
"No, it's the opposite. I'm always in the position of burdening you. It's all thanks to you that I was able to transfer to Midgard, I... 've worried the whole time whether I caused you trouble."
"No way... I do not find it troublesome at all... To be able to see your face every day, to be able to hear your voice every day... To be able to touch you whenever I wish to touch you... This is already enough to satisfy me."
Mitsuki touched my body gently and exhaled slightly.
"What do you mean, you're satisfied...? Feel free to do make even more willful demands, okay? As long as it's in my power, I will do anything for you."
But after hearing what I said, Mitsuki shook her head.
"...No, I cannot be so reliant on you, Nii-san. I am Midgard's student council president and captain of the Counter-Dragon Squad."
After saying that, Mitsuki looked up. Although her eyes were moist, no tears had fallen. Together at a distance where we could feel each other's breathing, we gazed at each other.
"I know there are responsibilities you must bear given your position, but—"
"That is not all. Due to my willfulness, I rendered your gesture moot, Nii-san. I have no right to ask you to indulge me."
"What are you referring to?"
I did not quite understand what she meant, so I asked. Mitsuki smiled wryly.
"Three years ago. You claimed the battle against Hekatonkheir as your doing alone, so as to protect my town and daily life. But what I truly wanted to protect was every day I spend together with you, Nii-san. Watching that peaceful town... All it did was increase my loneliness."
"Mitsuki..."

"That was why I could not bear your absence... I wanted to see you, Nii-san, to hear your voice again no matter what... That was why I followed."
Mitsuki looked away and confessed shyly.
"Mitsuki... You outed yourself as a D?"
"Yes... because I came to Midgard only to see you, Nii-san, but you were not here. Honestly, I... am always making mistakes."
Unable to bear Mitsuki's self-deprecating smile, I spoke up.
"Mitsuki, didn't you get me reassigned to Midgard? It's all thanks to you that we can be reunited like this."
"But your three years will not come back. And my authority was acquired by committing an irredeemable crime. It is absolutely not something to be proud of."
Irredeemable crime—That probably referred to killing her dragonified best friend in the Kraken battle two years ago.
"...Mitsuki, you are completely correct. I won't force you to be proud of it, but you don't have to regret it either."
"At all times, Nii-san... You are always so kind, but I cannot indulge myself like that."
Mitsuki pushed my chest lightly and separated herself.
"To atone for my crime, I shall continue to fight relentlessly. Satisfaction is an extravagant wish that I dare not hope for. The childhood wish... can remain unactualized. It does not matter."
Mitsuki finished in a tone of suppressed emotions while smiling sorrowfully.
Seeing that kind of smile, I felt an intense impulse surge from the bottom of my heart.
"—How could it not matter?"
"Huh?"
Mitsuki widened her eyes in surprise. Following that impulse, I had sat up forcibly. Despite the sharp pain centered on my left shoulder, I gritted my teeth and did not scream.
"N-Nii-san!? You cannot get out of bed yet!"
Mitsuki frantically tried to stop me but I grabbed her shoulder instead, to convey my feelings to her.
"Mitsuki, if you can only forgive yourself by devoting yourself to battles... Then I will put everything on the line to terminate those kinds of battles."
"Nii-san...?"
"Listen carefully, Mitsuki. I will never—abandon your happiness."
Looking Mitsuki in the eye, I asserted strongly. Mitsuki gasped lightly with tears in her eyes, but before the tears could fall from her eyes, she wiped them with her hand.
"Seriously... Nii-san is seriously..."
While grumbling, Mitsuki leaned her face towards me. Our foreheads touched together.
Then smiling faintly, she continued in a gentle voice:
"—Nii-san, you are so hardheaded."

そして淡く微笑(ほほえ)み、優しい声で言葉を続けた。
「――兄さんは、石頭なんですから」

Afterword

This is Tsukasa, I am so grateful to you for buying *Unlimited Fafnir II, Scarlet Innocent*.
Roughly three months after the previous installment, Volume 2 came out successfully, this is all thanks to everyone's support.
New characters have been added this time, making for quite a lively volume. Transfer students, the principal, and a new enemy, it's quite a lot of content.
I didn't hold back with foreshadowing that I refrained from using in Volume 1. It feels like the plot will start to accelerate all at once from this point onwards. Since the finish line is still very far away, I won't slow down until I get there. I'll sprint my hardest to the very end.
Then putting that aside—apart from the protagonist, almost all characters appearing have been ladies, but actually, in terms of setting, the gender ratio actually isn't that biased. The main reason for that is the presence of Sleipnir. Sleipnir is composed of young men whom Major Loki gathered together. With those eight and Yuu's friends and acquaintances from his NIFL days, *Unlimited Fafnir*'s gender ratio is almost even. Also, the dragons attacking in search of mates are also male, you know?
If I write a prequel about the NIFL days, things would probably be the exact reverse, turning into "a story filled with men." Since there's no demand, I think I probably won't have a chance to do that...
Of course, the next volume will still be a story about Iris, Mitsuki, Tia and the rest. It won't suddenly become "a world of men" so please rest assured.
Characters have increased and the plot is getting a bit rushed, but conversely, next volume is expected to be quite an easy read. Whether combat or romance, I will further intensify them, so please look forward to the decisive battle against *that* dragon in Volume 3.
Oh, one more thing to announce is that the manga adaptation for this series has been approved! I heard that the details will be gradually announced on the official website and various places, so please check it out if you have a chance.
Then next up are acknowledgements.
Korie Riko-sensei, I sincerely thank you for your lovely illustrations again. It's a kind of bliss to be able to see so many attractive girls. With Tia on the cover first of all, the swimsuit scene in the color pages and Iris not wearing something, every illustration is so cute and perfect!

Editor in charge, Shouji-sama, I am thankful to you again for your swift and precise suggestions. Whenever you point things out to me, I always discover what I overlooked and it's very helpful to me. I will strive to improve so please continue to be generous with your advice.
Then I would like to thank everyone involved in this book's production.
Okay, see you all next time.

Tsukasa, 2013 August

Illustrator's Afterword

あとがき

祝！ファフニール２巻!!

ティアちゃんにスク水で抱きつかれたい。

柚緒りこ

Congratulations! Volume 2 of Unlimited Fafnir!
I really want a hug from Tia in a swimsuit.

Korie Riko

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